

The
SCREAM
Factory



ALLEN K. 92

THE WORST HORROR IN THE WORLD!!!

An Entire Issue Taking Potshots at the Worst of the Horror Genre
Novels • Stories • Films • Comics • Television
Cthulhu Mythos • Pulp Fiction • and more!

Issue # 10 • Autumn, 1992 • \$6.00

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Ratings System

6 Bomb
* Poor
** Fair
*** Good
**** Excellent

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Welcome to "the worst issue ever" of TSF, spotlighting the worst books, films, etc. that the horror genre has ever spewed forth. This issue is something that my co-editor Peter and I have been talking about doing for quite a while (our third head, John, professes little involvement—and much embarrassment—with this particular theme). The roots of this issue of TSF can be traced back to issue #30 of *The Monster Times*, a '70s era monster movie mag that was notable for its just plain fun approach (see Peter's monster mag column in TSF #9 for more details). Issue #30 of TMT has stuck in our minds for some 18 years now, finally spurring us to do a similarly-themed issue of TSF, albeit on a much larger scale.

In order to give credit where credit is due, we're reprinting the centerpiece of TMT #30, an annotated listing of the 50 worst monster movies ever made. Thanks go to Les Waldstein of TMT for granting permission for this reprint. Incidentally—and ironically—there is a good deal of interest in reviving TMT these days—at least three different parties have contacted Waldstein about resuscitating the mag, and there's a good chance that it will come to pass. We'll discuss that topic and others in an interview with the original TMT folks in an upcoming issue. Before we move on, one other word about inspirations: the June, 1983 issue of *Twilight Zone Magazine* contained several book lists, including a compilation of bad horror books by R.S. Hadji. Since this TZ list was the source of fond memories, as well as a catalyst for this issue, it's reprinted here also.

Next, a word about this issue's "political correctness," or lack thereof. Some people will undoubtedly think that it's not cool to devote 100+ pages to abusing the efforts of others, no matter how firmly our tongues are in our cheeks. Well, all we can say is that it's not our intent to hurt anybody's feelings, but rather just to express a few opinions and have some fun. Hopefully, those whose work is spotlighted here will maintain their sense of humor. If nothing else, we here at TSF can say that we're not hypocrites—we're not above poking a little fun at ourselves as well. To this end, we've reprinted (on the opposite page) the text of two negative reviews of TSF. We don't agree with them, but we try to take them as constructive criticism. Of course, it's a little bit easier for us to grin and bear it since, to our knowledge, these are the only two negative reviews that we've ever gotten (not to mention that the worst of the two reviews appeared in an utterly preposterous journal, and that the reviewer in question just *may* have been harboring some ill will because I gave a reference guide of his a partially-negative review a few years back).

Enough crowing. I also want to apologize for the absence of a TSF BiblioFile featuring Brian Lumley in this issue. We planned on running the Lumley section in this issue, but when it got right down to it, we didn't have the room for two Lumley stories, an interview, and a bibliography—so it'll all run next issue. We also had to bump a planned Cthulhu genealogy chart, and an article on Japanese horror comics. As it turns out, every single column and article in this issue relates to the "worst of" theme. Although we've certainly had thematic issues in the past, this is the first time that *everything* in the issue relates to the theme. Beware sensory overload on crappy horror.

Next issue will be another thematic issue, but it won't encompass the entire contents the way this issue's topic does. The theme for #11 will be that infamous new sub-genre "dark suspense." Just what the hell is dark suspense, anyway? Check out TSF #11, where-in we explore the roots of the sub-genre, and attempt to determine if it's just a bunch of marketing hype and re-packaging. Next issue will also contain the debut of not one, not two, but *three* new columns. And yes, we are thinking of changing our name to *The Column Factory*. The new columns consist of Kevin Lindemuth on TV horror, Rodger Gerberding on horrific artwork, Gary Braunbeck on horror films that aren't necessarily marketed as such. We think you'll enjoy all of them, but we promise—no more new columns after these three (although John has been talking about doing a column on horrific puppet shows in Eastern Europe...).

Special thanks are due Allen Koszowski for providing the wonderful wrap-around cover art. After all, what's a "worst of horror" issue without Tor Johnson on the cover? Until next time...

— Bob Morrish

The Worst Reviews in the World:

Review by Ellen Datlow from The Year's Best Fantasy And Horror Fifth Annual Collection:

The Scream Factory edited by Peter Infantino (Editor's note: Oh sure, give Peter all the blame, and don't mention Bob and John.) is trying to be the professional news magazine of the horror field but so far is only partially successful. #7 covers the 1980s in horror. There are numerous lists, some illuminating and fun, others boring. Is it really necessary to list every horror novel published in the 1980s? The "biggest yawns of the '80s" was interesting, as were some of the commentary on trends, hot new writers, and so forth. Usually the only fiction in *The Scream Factory* is the awful Wyrmswood series. Someone please kill it. #6 (to back-track) is an all-fiction issue of the magazine—the best of the batch is the subtle and moving Douglas Clegg story. The magazine always look good, with a readable design but the art in #6 is heavy-handed, occasionally even giving away the plot of a story (Editor's note: especially for you, Ellen, see page 80).

Review by Neil Barron from The Science Fiction Research Association Review:

When Bob Morrish, one of the three publishers/editors of *The Scream Factory*, sent me two specimen issues (7, summer 1991, and 8, winter 1991/92), I wasn't encouraged by the b&w cover illustrations or the legend on Issue 8, "Special Giant Monster Issue!" The last thing I needed was a variant of Ackerman's awful if popular *Famous Monsters of Filmland*.

The issues are probably fairly typical examples of low-budget desktop publishing by amateurs, technically more proficient than the fanzines of yesteryear but—in this case—strictly for the horror fiction/film buff who will excuse the illustrations and the chatty in-group quality of the prose.

If these issues are typical, the 60-70 page two-column 8 1/2 x 11 magazine is a mixture of book reviews (15-25 in these issues), magazine reviews, short articles (a survey of horror fiction and cinema in the 1980s in 7, of Godzilla films and giant monster novels in 8), free-wheeling commentary by the editors and contributors, and some fiction. The fiction may be commissioned, since they say the magazine is closed to fiction submissions, but open to non-fiction and illustrations.

I don't see *The Scream Factory* on Hugo lists any time soon, but what it lacks in finesse, wit or sophistication is partially offset by the enthusiasm of the editors and contributors. Publication is apparently sporadic (Editor's note: Oh yeah? So are you!).

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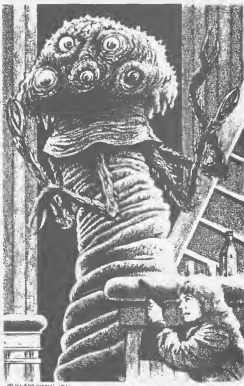
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— *Weird Tales*

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— *Small Press magazine*

Rants n' Ruminations

by
Bob Morrish

Well, it's that time again—time to relay to you all of the various stories, rumors, hearsay, and down right bullshit that I've come across, with a not inconsiderable dash of my own opinion thrown in for good measure.

Fear magazine, that gaudy 4-color slick from the UK which reached the grand old age of 34 issues, is now officially dead. Although the last issue appeared back in October, 1991, there had been some ongoing hope for its revival, since editor John Gilbert owned the magazine name and concept, having only leased them to Newsfield Publishing, which published the mag until going under (or, as they say over there, "going into receivership"). Gilbert attempted to interest several publishers in the concept, but was ultimately unsuccessful, despite a couple of "almosts."

Massachusetts' Tundra Publishing, most notable for their *Taboo* graphic anthologies (AKA comic books) apparently did offer to publish a new incarnation of *Fear*, but their insistence on

reducing production costs (less use of color, less pages, etc.) dissuaded Gilbert from agreeing to the deal. There was also a rumor that the UK-based Pegasus would be taking over publishing duties, but that ultimately proved to be unfounded.

Speaking of *Taboo* and horror comics, Northstar—which had looked at one point as if it were certain to join Newsfield and countless other publishers among the deceased—has rebounded of late, and recently advertised a forthcoming (1st quarter, '93) comic entitled *Slash*, which is credited to David Schow, along with Mort Castle, Mark Nelson, and Jim O'Barr. Since Schow is up to his ears and other appendages in Hollywood these days, one can only assume that this is an old concept or story of Schow's that Northstar is just now getting around to publishing. One of Schow's tales was adapted for the ill-fated Northstar comic *Horrors*, *The Illustrated Book Of Fears* a couple of years back, and it's likely that the *Slash* concept dates from that same period. Time will tell.

One more comics note: nothing against Nancy Collins, who's written some outstanding fiction in her brief career, but isn't the lack of excitement over her current stint as author of *Swamp Thing* rather surprising—and disappointing? After reaching incredible heights while Alan Moore was at the helm, *Swamp Thing* lapsed into doldrums for a few years. When Collins signed on as the writer, hopes were raised for a return to Swampy's glory days of multi-layered stories and fascinating characters. The results don't seem to validate the high hopes. One suspects that, rather than a case of Collins really failing, it's simply that much of the story potential for *Swamp Thing* has been exhausted over the course of 125+ issues.

CD Publications should have two books under their belt by the time that you read this: Ed Gorman's *Prisoners* and the anthology *The Definitive Best Of The Horror Show*. The Gorman title seems to have sold quite well, and CD's Rich Chizmar

reports that advance sales on the *Horror Show* book were also very strong, seemingly disproving my theory that the latter book would be a difficult sell.

Next up for CDP is a 750-copy of edition of Joe Lansdale's *Act Of Love*, followed by the first volume of the new, *Night Visions*-style anthology series, *Thrillers*. Due to other commitments, Richard Laymon has bowed out of the initial volume. His place has been taken by Rex Miller, who will join Nancy Collins, Chet Williamson, and Ardath Mayhar as the featured writers.

The really big news from CDP though, involves the aforementioned Joe R. Lansdale. CDP has acquired the rights to two forthcoming collections by the red-hot Lansdale. The first collection, with the working title *Writer Of The Purple Rage*, will contain at least 1/3 original material, with the balance consisting of reprints of his most recent short fiction. The second volume, as yet untitled, will reprint a vari-

ety of older, previously uncollected material.

Corralling Lansdale was quite a coup for Chizmar, and news of the deal is certain to disappoint former Lansdale publishers such as Mark Ziesing, Borderlands, Dark Harvest, and Pulphouse.

Since I mentioned Ed Gorman above, let's take a second to note that Ed is giving up active involvement in the magazine *Mystery Scene*, which he launched some 35 issues and many years ago. Ed has been slowly departing the scene over the last few issues, with the ubiquitous Marty Greenberg taking over editing duties, and now Ed's son Joe is taking over production duties. An unfortunate consequence of all the changes is *MS's* termination of horror coverage (perhaps at the behest of new editor Greenberg?). Although publications such as *Necrofile*, *Tekali-III*, and *TSF* provide plenty of non-fiction coverage of the horror genre these

days, *MS* had some unique features, including their series of "how I wrote my latest book" articles by various authors. Additionally, *MS* probably got many mystery fans interested in horror fiction.

Last issue's comments on the advisability (or lack thereof) of the Overlook Connection Press printing a limited edition of Gary Raisor's *Less Than Human* drew a reaction from the man behind OCP, Dave Hirschberger, who ticked off a list of reasons why he did the book—with one of the primary factors being the extremely small print run of the Jove paperback.

Nothing against OCP—I wish them the best—but the fact remains that I wouldn't want to be trying to sell 1,000 copies of a book by a new author during these recessionary times, especially when there's a pb edition, however scarce, to be found as well. What's worse, the hardcover is now three months behind.

Starmont, that erstwhile publisher of obscure pulp reprints and short-run academic works, has gone "on hiatus for six months," and many question whether they will return.

Since the death of founder Ted Diky several months ago, Starmont has undergone a fair amount of additional turmoil, including a complete overhauling of their typesetting and print-

Deathrealm's Past to be Preserved; Magazine may have a future as well

Tangram Publishing, a Maine-based comics publisher, will soon be releasing the reprint anthology *Deathrealms: The Best Of Deathrealm Magazine*, edited by *Deathrealm* editor/publisher Mark Rainey.

This trade paperback, scheduled to be out by Halloween, will feature four-color covers by Steve Blissette, and will contain 18 or so tales taken from issues 1 thru 17 of *Deathrealm*.

There also exists the strong possibility of an as-yet unnamed publisher buying out the magazine *Deathrealm* and retaining Rainey as editor. If this deal should fall through, the status of *Deathrealm* will continue to hover between "on hiatus" and "gone away."

ing operations, and a rumored decision to, at the very least, drop all pulp reprints. If Starmont should fall by the wayside, a significant publishing niche would open up.

The continuing fine efforts of Roadkill Press are worthy of mention, if only to prove that this column doesn't just print negative news. Among Roadkill's recent accomplishments are chapbooks by Norman Partridge, Wayne Allen Sallee, and Steve Rasnic & Melanie Tem. Roadkill books have consistently displayed fine production values, worthwhile fiction, and classy art.

But wait, there's more...The alert among you may have noticed that Roadkill pulled an abrupt about-face on an announced chapbook from Kathe Koja, entitled *Queen Of Angels*. Just about the time that the book was supposed to be published, Roadkill instead issued a notification that the story wasn't going to be published—at least not by Roadkill. The word on the proverbial street is that Ms. Koja, and/or her agent, pulled the plug on Roadkill at the last minute, selling the story instead to a higher bidder (*Omni* magazine, perhaps?). Apparently there was no formal contract to weasel out of, and Roadkill took the news with a "grin and bear it" attitude, but the whole situation seems to emit a worse odor than even the infamous Funhole.

Speaking of "women of horror," let's briefly line up our sights on two apparent "women of dishonor"—Suzy Hartzell and Dawn Pauline Dunn, better known by their

report that full-size periodicals sell much, much better than digest size, so *WT* seemingly made the switch in the hope of reaping increased newsstand sales. However, this "financial band-aid" isn't

DEATH HOUSE—Killed in the Cutting Room?

I was recently reminded of a film entitled *DEATH HOUSE*, which was filmed in Los Angeles way back in 1988, with an incredible cast of re-treads, has-beens and never-was's. The film starred Dennis Cole, Tony Franciosa, and Doug McClure's daughter, Tawny, among others, and was directed by none other than John Saxton.

I had occasion to be on the set of this turkey (covering it for *Cinefantastique Magazine* at the time) and, in the course of an interview, producer Nick Mancuso referred to the movie as a "GAF" film (his acronym for gangster-action-horror). Judging by the incredibly low-budget nature of the proceedings, that term is also likely to approximate the gagging sounds made by the audience, should the film ever see the light of day. Given the relative success of virtually anything, which comes out on video these days, it seems surprising that this schlocker has never (to my knowledge) been released.

pen name of Pauline Dunn. After having published four horror novels through Zebra, the story recently broke that the pair had apparently blatantly plagiarized a portion of Dean Koontz' *Phantoms* in the course of "writing" their books *The Crawling Dark* and *Demonic Color*.

I'm the first one to cry "Innocent until proven guilty," but Dawn n' Suzy's failure to come forth with any rebuttal—in fact, they've pulled a virtual vanishing act—doesn't exactly lead one to believe in their innocence.

In the face of declining sales, *Weird Tales* has reformatted, going from digest size to 8 1/2 x 11 measurements. Distributors typically

going to help subscription sales any, and *WT*'s financial problems apparently run pretty deep. Only time will tell if the fourth incarnation of this grand old mag will survive.

Spine-Tingling's much-ballyhooed, and well-advertised, audio tapes—featuring stories by the likes of Matt Costello, Kevin Anderson, Joseph Citro, Rick Hautala, et al—are apparently not selling very well. Spine-Tingling's lack of financial rewards has led to the delay of the anthology *Shivers* (scheduled to appear in both book and tape formats) until the Spring of '93.

Fans of Dean Koontz may have heard in the past that Underwood-Miller was working on *Sudden Terror: The Dean Koontz Companion*, edited by Bill Munster (also known as the editor/publisher of *Footsteps* magazine and *Footsteps Press*). Although U-M is very close-mouthed about the whole affair, it seems that Munster was offered a much sweeter deal, and managed to get out of his agreement with U-M. Apparently, the *Koontz Companion* will now be the product of not just Munster, but also Ed Gorman and Marty Greenberg, and it will appear under the imprint of Koontz's own fiction publisher, Putnam.

All signs are that *Midnight Graffiti* magazine is "deader than a doornail," as my grandmother used to say. The mag is apparently history, even though a *Best of MG* anthology recently appeared from Warner Books. Maybe the huge sums (by small press standards) paid to Harlan Ellison and other contributors helped capsize editor/publisher James Van Hise's operation. Rumor has it that some other, less-renowned, contributors are still seeking payment.

That's all the dirt I can dig up for now. Until next time...

B

Book Review

Child's Play

by Sal Conte

Leisure, 1990; 400 pp.; \$3.95

Reviewed By Brian Mullen

Don't be confused by the title. This book has nothing to do with the movie of the same name. The residents of Crandall, New York are obsessed with baseball, especially since the Randall Giants have won the National Little League championship two years in a row. After Dana Evans and her workaholic husband Rick move to town, their son Todd wants to try out for the team. Dana, previously worried that her marriage was crumbling due to Rick's indifference to them, is encouraged when her husband finally shows some interest in the boy. After a rocky start in their new town, Dana is optimistic about the change in Rick. But wait! There's the usual unspeakable evil in this sleepy little town. At first, Dana is unnerved by the malevolent stares from the boy across the street. And then it really gets ugly when the groundskeeper and an umpire are bludgeoned to death with a baseball bat.

Dana, a freelance journalist, takes a job with the Crandall Guardian, the town newspaper, hoping to investigate the disappearance of twelve-year-old Thomas Grote. But her attempts to interview the boy's parents are thwarted by the domineering coach of the Giants, Philip Dreiser.

Even more disturbing, Dana notices, is how serious the boys are on the practice field. There's no laughter or horseplay. They practice with robot-like precision. Something creepy is going on here! Sounds a bit like John Saul's *Creature*, doesn't it?

This book is inferior in every way. While Conte's prose moves at a brisk pace, much of the dialog is incredibly stilted. And Dana Evans is such a wishy-washy heroine! She pleads with Rick to take Todd off the team, but she always gives in to him. As for Rick, he's such an idiot that he refuses to believe that something is wrong in Crandall. The book is inundated with mindless bickering between these two clucks. The supporting characters are much more interesting: the abusive, beer-guzzling Mike Perotti, who wants his son to be the next Brooks Robinson; the cantankerous newspaper reporter Max Richter, who may or may not be on Dana's side; Fritz Warner, the local doctor whose kindly bedside manner is not all that it seems; the cool, menacing Dreiser, who has the entire town in his grip. Conte's book has some good ideas, but the results are contrived.

★ 1/2

Quick Chills



by Peter Fantolino

"And now, Miss Jane, you ain't even got a head."

Earlier this year, the first in a series of hardcovers exploring different genres of comics was released. Mike Benton's *The Taylor Illustrated History of Horror Comics* (144 pages, \$21.95) is a beautiful full-color exploration of all those wonderful creepy comic books you see on the wall at conventions, but really don't want to shell out a century note for. A feast to the eyes, yes, but unfortunately, not for the mind. The text is run-of-the-mill, barely skimming the surface of either the stories or the magazines themselves. The "History" itself is only 88 pgs (the remainder of the book is a useful, but just as rushed, index to horror titles), so there's no way Benton can squeeze more than just passing references and a few plot summaries. Though it's probably essential to a horror comic textbook, I could have done without the 3,000th retelling of the "Wertham-Seduction of the Innocent" witch trials. To his credit though, Benton only spends nine pages on EC. Sure, these were the greatest comics of the '50s, but there have been whole books written about them (the best, for my money, being the running commentary in Russ Cochran's *EC Library Volumes*).

Is it worth the twenty-two bucks? Sure. You're getting a visual, if not audio picture of what got you into horror in the first place. Could it have been much better?

What a natural segue into why I brought this book up in the first place. If the text had been written by one George Suarez, the Taylor book would have become the indispensable encyclopedia of horror comics (which I believe will be written by Steve Bisette some day). So, who's George Suarez? He's the editor of a comic titled *Tales Too Terrible to Tell* (New England Comics \$3.50—which is the source of the line that begins this column). From the outside the comic looks just like your average lousy horror

title. But when you open it up...you get lousy horror comics! In fact, *TTTTT* is one of the first books I've run into that actually lived up to its title.

TTTTT reprints pre-code horror, some of the worst slop to come out in panels, and shows us some of the most colorful covers to grace a newsstand (these guys couldn't write their way out of the HWA, but they sure had an eye for a cover). Some of the more memorable tales to grace the first six issues include:

"Clumsy," about an oafish, yet ingenious scientist who discovers how to freeze bodies and bring them back to life years later. When his money-hungry wife finds out about this, she talks the dope into icing her and collecting insurance money. But this guy is so clumsy, he shatters her body into a thousand ice cubes, and has to reconstruct it! Unfortunately, some parts had already started to melt, so...

The title of "Horror of Mixed Torsos" (in *TTTTT* #2) speaks for itself, but doesn't divulge the inanity of the story. Hunchbacked mortician's assistant Garth Hunt has the hots for lovely Faith Wales. Luckily, Faith dies an early death, and Garth gets to spend some intimate time with the good-looking corpse, until the family shows up to move the body overseas. Garth starts chopping folks down right and left, chucking their halves into big barrels. Unfortunately for Garth, he mixes the halves up, and as any good horror fan knows, when you mix parts from different bodies, they will

rise from the dead! The last panel shows Garth getting an axe in the head:

"As oblivion strikes you in an agony of pain, the last thing you see from the enshrouding darkness is those figures, dividing up into four toreros again and—collapsing on the floor—unmixed at last!"

But my favorite comes from the pages of *TTTTT's* sister publication *Extinct!* (NEC \$3.50), edited by Larry Boyd. *Extinct!* crosses genres, not exclusively reprinting bad horror, reminding us that there were equally bad Western, Love, War, and Science Fiction comics in the 50s. My all-time favorite "bad story" has to be "The Green Horror" reprinted in *Extinct!* #1. George and Martha Thorton, on a trip to New Mexico decide to stop alongside the road and clip a piece off a cactus. Martha plants it when she gets home and hubby George, for reasons unknown, develops a great hatred for the poor, misunderstood succulent. Before long, the crazed husband decides to cut the thing down, but his axe is snatched from his hands by the cactus, who has decided Martha is the girl for him. Despite obvious racial differences, the cactus murders George and Martha's subsequent second husband ("Time passes-and time heals!"), and attempts to make nooky with Martha. The misguided cactus (with a smile on its...face!) crushes the woman in a "jealous embrace" and then apparently just dies, where the cops find the pair in the morning.

Such writing, such emotion, you can't find these kind of haunting images in any Leisure paperback. But the best thing about *TTTTT* and *Extinct!* is the well-researched backgrounds on these dopey comics. As not-

ed before, Suarez is the guy to write the book on horror, or at least, judging from the first six installments of his "Terrology" column, the history of bad horror comics. We get in-depth looks at the publishers, checklists of publishers and titles, individual issue and story synopsis, and panel and cover repros. Suarez notes that "Terrology" is "an index/Collector's Guide to the Pre-Code Horror Comics" which will be published by NEC in the next couple of years. Suarez hopes that the book will include hundreds of full color cover repros and representative interior art. All of us who love to read about this kind of thing should await the book with high expectations. Hey, McCammon, King and all the giants have always said their first influence was EC Comics. If nothing else, stories like "The Green Terror," "Wiggles the Wonderworm," "Wall of Coahuila" and "The Curse of the Zamboori" hint at what Kelly, Trexler, and Sutphen read when they were tykes. Speaking of which, it's time to transition to...

**The Official Quick Chills
"Worst of the Worst"
also known as:**

Sex Clowns and Silly Sagas

or

The Day It rained Cats and Frogs

or

**11 reasons why Fahrenheit 451 might be a
decent idea after all**

When you read as much short fiction as I do, you're bound to run across a lot of junk. That's a given. In fact, most anthos I've run across in the last few years had more than their share of...shall we say, odiferous piles. But that's not really what this brief section is about (if it was, the section wouldn't be brief; in fact, we'd be here all year). These are the really offensive, the degenerate, the moronic, the stories that yell out at the reader "You are stupid, and I know it".



"Rainy Season" by Stephen King. You really can't blame James Van Hise of *Midnight Graffiti* for running this goofy mess. If King had sent it to us, we would've run it in a minute. Those are the mechanics of reality and finances. King sells.



Writers often comment how tired they are of hearing that old phrase: "Where do you get your ideas?". Stephen, where did you get the idea for a story about a town that rains frogs? And after that lightbulb went on, why didn't you simply turn it off?

"The Magic Show" by Chris Miller. Originally published in *National Lampoon*, and reprinted

in the infamous *More Devil's Kisses*, "The Magic Show" is kiddie porn without rhyme or reason. Not that any kiddie porn is relevant, but some horror fiction successfully incorporates pedophilia tastefully, or at least artfully. This story serves one purpose: to disgust. Miller seemingly thinks his readers will get a laugh from this story. I say "Where's the joke?" to a story about a sadistic party clown who makes a seven year-old girl have sex with a horse.

"The Bedposts of Life" by Robert Bloch. This, from the author of *Psycho*? The unamusing story of a vampire with a taste for prostitutes has something rare in a Bloch story. A climax you can see coming a mile away. It's hard to find a bad Bloch story, but this one made me wince. You can find it in the Ramsey Campbell



Issue of *Weird Tales*. Kinda ironic?

"It Helps If You Sing" by Ramsey Campbell. Incomprehensible gobbledygook. So you say, Peter, what sets this off from the rest of Campbell's stuff? The lousiest story in one of the best anthos of recent times, *The Book of the Dead*.

"Blood Suede Shoes"/ "Yea, Though I Drive"/ "Beneath Black Bayou", all by Ronald Kelly. I once read a very nasty review of a Paul McCartney album. The critic made the charge that McCartney always sets new standards in rock music. All of them lower. The same could be said of Ronald Kelly and horror fiction. To be fair, I have yet to read any of his novels,



and good things have been said of them (by the same guys that Kelly does blurbs for, though), but all of his short fiction I've had the displeasure of running across has been mind-achingly lame.

Kelly's stories are filled with clichés: the woman who gives birth to an abomination, the town that Satan takes over, the serial killer, ad nauseum. The problem with most of his prose is that inexplicable things happen to people we care not a bit about.

"Bonethrower" by Richard Sutphen. This story stands out from the rest of the crap in *Sexpunks* because of a de-lightful scene in which a nutty housewife and her wimp husband stop their car along the side of the road just long enough for the woman to munch on some roadkill and do an Indian dance. This is right out of *The Ed Wood Zone*, but with none of the naive charm. It's sick, offensive, and loony. A pox on the houses of all the critics who thought Sutphen's stories were "daring", "erotic", or "thought-provoking". This is junk, garbage, trash.



"A Taste For Liquor"/"The Case of the Shorts"/"Myself, and One Other" by Roger Dale Trexler. I list 3 titles, but I could have just as easily listed all 18 stories in Trexler's self-published booklet (now long out-of-print, I hope). *A Visit With The Shorts*, as all are deserving of recognition. Both "Taste" and "Shorts" break new ground in fecal storytelling (literally), the former dealing with fecal beer, while the latter offers up the first serial killer ever brought to justice on the basis of his offending fecal odor. My personal favorite (and Dan Quayle's too, if

he could read) though, would have to be "Myself" which chronicles a killer fetus at an abortion clinic. No need to ask Trexler how he voted this November. I vote thumbs down, way, way down on this crap.



OK, I done my job. There's a whole bunch of crap to avoid and maybe some crap you might enjoy. The best thing about bad books and bad cinema is that it's unending. The next really bad book is just around the corner. I can handle it if you can.

Editor's note: the preceding artwork was specially tailored to reflect the quality of the stories. The artwork is courtesy of the versatile and talented Dorothy Quark (unfortunately though, Dorothy's talents don't include art).

B

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THE WORST HORROR NOVELS OF ALL TIME

by
Don D'Amassa

Choosing the worst horror novels is a truly momentous undertaking because, like every field of literature, the amount of undeniably bad writing which makes its way into print is truly astonishing. There are many books out there which, in addition to being horror fiction, are truly horrible—in prose, concept, execution, or even simple sensibility. One could write an essay on Guy Smith's "Crab" series alone, or the original novels spun off from the *Dark Shadows* television program. But with a little more research, one can find the true gems of bad horror fiction, the ones which have mercifully faded from sight (and print), but which will forever lurk in the darker recesses of used book stores waiting to strike at unsuspecting readers. Consider that which follows as a warning.

Part One: The 1950s And 1960s

There was probably a great deal of truly terrible horror fiction published prior to the 1950s, but most of that is mercifully unavailable. Sydney Horler's clumsy and boring vampire novel, *The Curse of Doone*, was reprinted by Paperback Library in the 1960s, but was designed to appear as a gothic romance. But even though horror fiction really wasn't very popular in the US during this period, a few excellent novels did appear, along with a handful of clunkers.

Worst Christian Horror Novel:

Steven Angley's *Raptured* (Winston Press, 1950) shows us the Earth under the rule of the Beast, in the last days before we are all to be judged. The protagonist and his family must deal with temptation and tribulation to save their souls. "Honey, I would gladly give up all we have saved to get you medical aid, but we cannot sell our soul and become like a demon from hell." Right.

Worst Horror Detective Series:

Paul Fairman had already produced a dreadfully bad horror novel, *Rest In Agony* (Monarch, 1963), so he was a perfect pick for the "Man From S.T.U.D." supernatural detective series from Lancer in 1968. With titles like *Orgy at Madame Dracula's* and *Sock It To Me Zombie*, how could you go wrong?

Worst Zombie Novel of All Time:

Although this title was challenged decades later, *Drums of the Dark Gods* by W.A. Baillinger (Paperback Library, 1966) remains the most boring and unimaginative novel of houngans raising a zombie army to take over the world.

Worst Horror Romance Novel:

Until 1982, *The Witch's Curse* by Henry Ludlam (Award, 1964) provided the absolute worst blend of gothic terror and romance. Others writing in the field, most notably Dorothy Daniels and Dan Ross, had introduced genuine supernatural elements into their oth-

erwise formulaic stories, but while their works are bland and uninteresting for the most part, Ludlam took the title by having his characters use snappy, idiosyncratic dialogue. "Woman is found in river. Such is life."

Part Two: The Golden Age Of Bad Horror: The 1970s

Horror fiction had begun to catch on as we moved into the 1970s, attracting scores of writers, including some who probably would have made good ditch diggers. As the field grew and diversified, some of these people found entirely new ways to dispense with common sense.

Worst "Abominable Snowman" Novel:

I open the 1970s section with this category simply because this theme has attracted so much of the worst in horror writing. In fact, I confess that we have here a three-way tie for the honor, and that's not even counting Elmer Carpenter's SF novel, *Moonspin*, in which



Russians transport all the snowmen to the moon, since they're used to living where there's no oxygen. A brief flurry of snowmen novels appeared in 1977-1978, following the publication of *Nights with Sasquatch*, ostensibly by John Cotter and Judith Frankle (Berkley Books). Supposedly the true account of Frankie's abduction, seduction, and bestial romance, recounted by Cotter, the book is actually copyright by Jack Couffer, who made the whole thing up.

This was followed in short order by *Sasquatch: Monster of the Northwest Woods* by M.E. Knerr (Belmont). This time there's no sex involved, just oodles of heads pulled off bodies, treks through the snowy woods, and eyes glowing in the darkness beyond the edge of the campfire. Finally (mercifully) we have *Snow Man* by Norman Bogner (Dell), which has the saving grace of reasonable prose, but provides

some interesting details we never previously knew about Sasquatch. For one thing, he has lasers mounted in his eyes, lasers so powerful that the heat from their blast actually sets the snow on fire and reduces it to a charred mass! Complete with a native American wiseman who remains in touch with the natural world, a horror cliché in itself.

Worst "Giant Insects" Novel:

They've been a staple of low budget SF films for years, but giant insects can be found in horror fiction as well. *Eat Them Alive* by Pierce Nace (Manor, 1977) features an embittered man who discovers a species of giant preying mantis on a remote island and brings them back to the civilized world as instruments of his vengeance. The frequent scenes of gore are so badly written, the only screams they induce are of laughter.



Worst Ecological Horror Novel:

Another common SF theme, this award goes to *Death Cloud* by Michael Mannion (Leisure, 1976). The town of Dorchester is bothered by mysterious clouds which remain stationary in the sky, and through which the sun's rays are reduced in illumination but somehow magnified in terms of heat. Our polluting ways are responsible, the author tells us, as the clouds are revealed to be a new form of life threatening the human race.

Worst "Aliens Among Us" Novel:

It was inevitable that someone would write a novel about livestock mutilations, so *The Cattle Mutilators* by John J. Dalton (Manor, 1980—but it was written in the '70s) should have been no surprise. What was surprising was the poor grasp of science (the incisions are made between the cells of the subject animals), the overabundance of clichés—including secret

government coverups, visits from the Men in Black, and so forth—and the revelation that Earth is merely an experiment being conducted by extra-dimensional beings.



Worst "Dinosaurs Return" Novel:

It's hard to read *The Demon Samurai* by Clay Grant (Belmont, 1978) and not suspect it was written as a joke. A film crew is making a low-budget ripoff of the Godzilla movies when an ancient Oriental Demon manifests itself in the form of the featured creature and menaces members of the cast.

Worst Haunted House Novel:

There were a lot of contenders for this, but for silliness and obvious pandering to Hollywood's version of horror, *Satan's Manor* by Mark Andrews (Leisure, 1977) wins hands down. A movie crew intent on making a haunted house film rents a mansion with an unsavory reputation, as well as demons, voodoo rites, werewolves, and the odd ghost or three.



Worst Novel About Native Americans:

Popular Library's mercifully short-lived *Frankenstein Horror Series* brought us some of the worst original horror novels of all time. *Dragon's Teeth* by Keith Miles (1973) blends New Orleans voodoo and a tomb filled with the bones of ancient Indian warriors who are magically able to return from the dead to expel interlopers from the land of their descendants. I particularly enjoyed it when soldiers equipped with modern weapons decide to attack the undead creatures with their bayonets.

Worst Phantom of the Opera Ripoff:

Also from Popular Library we have Otto O. Binder's *The Hospital Horror* (1973). A mysterious figure haunts a major city hospital, interfering with operations, until ultimately revealed as a hunchback angry because he was not treated with Substance X, a supposed cure for his condition.

Worst Dialogue in a Horror Novel:

This goes to *The Marrow Eaters* by Harris Moore (Popular Library, 1972). The story concerns yet another Native American who understands nature, a ghoul who sucks the marrow from human bones, and a skeptical but lovable scientist and his beautiful but dumb daughter. Includes great lines such as: "We don't have much time by my book." "Just tell your subconscious—convince it—that everything's over. Tell it to let you alone." "The sheriff wants to know if we've been experimenting with a monster that tears people apart."

Worst Novelization of a Horror Film:

Picking on movie novelizations is like shooting sitting ducks, but no list of bad horror fiction would be complete without just one. Arthur N. Scarm's *The Werewolf vs Vampire Woman* (G-H Books, 1972) narrowly beats out Ed Wood's *Orgy of the Dead* for this honor. A werewolf and a vampire team up and move to Hollywood to portray themselves in movies, until they have a falling out and battle to the death. Or undeath, I suppose.



Worst "Man into Beast" Novel

Draco the Dragon Man by Cyril Donson (New English Library, 1974) proves that no matter how bad the "stock" monster movie may get, it's still possible to write a novel even worse. After undergoing a blood transfusion from a scaled underground dweller, an archaeologist is periodically transformed into a were-

dragon hungry for human flesh.

Worst "Ineffable Power" Novel:

Badger Books was infamous for its dreadfully bad line of SF novels, but their horror fiction was equally awful. In *Chaos* by Thornton Bell, a discorporate force of evil that formed the basis for the legends of the djinn wanders out of the wilderness and tries to reassert its power in the modern world. "This is the story of the indomitable human spirit in conflict with a horror as old as time itself." Right,

Worst Mutation Novel:

Another standard SF theme is that of the mutant, as featured in *Night of the Black Horror* by Victor Norwood (Badger). Mutated slime controlled by a "pulsating brain" wanders the countryside, leaving a "ponderous, slithering wake" of "a putrid stench of awful death." Gobbling up everything in sight, it eventually succumbs to the "indomitable human spirit" apparently some left over from the previous book.

Part Three: The 1980s

I am happy to note that little horror fiction I have encountered in the past decade has even come close to rivaling that listed above. The

biggest problem with modern horror fiction is the constant reiteration of standard themes with neither style nor originality to endear them to us. I mean, how many demonic children are we supposed to find frightening, anyway? How many different ways will Guy Smith find to menace the world with carnivorous crabs? Will William Johnstone ever write a novel that doesn't include violent dismemberment?

I'd like to think that the improvement is because the reading public has become more sophisticated, but I'm afraid that if I say it too loudly, some evil force will rise from its fetid lair and fill the bookstores with more of the same. And lest we be too complacent, there are still a handful of awards to be presented.

Special Group Award:

This goes to all those writers like Hans Holzer and Jay Anson who wrote haunted house stories and tried to convince us they were non-fiction. Whitley Strieber turned to SF to do the same thing for *Communion* and its follow-up, *Mojestic*, but he at least may well believe in what he wrote.

Worst Horror Romance Novel:

Mary Vigliante's *Worship the Night* (Tower, 1982) supplants Henry Ludlam after nearly two

Say What???

Quotes out of context are often cheap shots, but in the case of the titles mentioned here, they're generally representative of the "quality" of the works as a whole. For your enlightenment, then, I present...

"But now I've got something to live for—because I love watching a man being eaten by a monster! Maybe it's a substitute for my lost virility..."

"At once he gouged out both eyes at once, using both hands, rolling the severed eyes in his giant grasp, then dropping them into his mouth and chewing them in hissing pleasure at the taste."

— *Eat Them Alive*

"The astronauts reported finding a new form of energy in space. Why, we don't even know what electricity is; we just know how it functions. We don't know why the Earth spins, why its axis is inclined, what power moves the tides. There could well be some kind of atmospheric radiation we don't know about." — *Death Cloud*

"He shielded his eyes from the intense glare and jumped back when the snow burst into flames. It smoked, then turned black, and he began to scream." — *Snow Man*

"I looked back at the Sasquatch. I realized that she did have to do it. She'd pussywhipped this goddamned ape. It was the only way she could cope, using her sex to save her life."

— *Nights with Sasquatch*

"For reasons we cannot fully understand, the emotional electron patterns found only in the human race cling to your plane, becoming locked between the two."

"Aligning and altering the chromosomes so that the transplant can inhabit earth without being radically different in appearance is a very time-consuming and critical piece of ultramicrosurgery...Much of the DNA became lost during transfer from the chemical changes due to high frequency." — *The Cattle Mutilators*

"But the panic. The slaughter on the highways. The hijacking of a train. The killing of all those guards at the Atlanta penitentiary—all those riots in the cities—the wholesale exodus of thousands—maybe by now, mil-

decades. Her protagonist is in love with a demon who has entranced her and requires human sacrifices as evidence of her affection. The dialogue is so leaden and plodding that I fell into a trance reading it.

Worst Horror Spy Series:

But you didn't even know there was a horror spy series. Well, there are two, but Ryder Syvertsen's "Mystic Rebel" series from Pinnacle loses easily to Irwin Zachariah's truncated "The Protector" series from Carousel in 1982. The protagonist is an agent who matches wits with an international cult of satanists in *Brotherhood of Evil and Princess of Darkness*. Features such evocative descriptive phrases as "Bulging-bicepped-boob."

Worst Reincarnation Novel:

Another hotly contested category, with even Barbara Cartland trying her hand, but the winner is Valerie James for *Bewitching Beyond* (Carousel, 1981). "Now I'm the one who'll taste the fruits of your beauty and savor the deliciousness that is you." Essentially 150 pages of foreplay with no consummation.

Worst World War II Horror Novel:

Werewolves by Jerry and Sharon Ahern (Pinnacle, 1990) is actually reasonably well-

written, but hinges on a gaping lack of logic. Toward the end of the war, the SS developed a means of converting people into werewolves to use as superwarriors, but then forgot to use them. In fact, everyone forgot about them until some time later, when they are found to be still alive by a traumatized war veteran.

Worst Oh-My-God-I'm-Pregnant Novel:

Edmund Plante's *Transformation* (Leisure, 1987) is a demonic baby variation, with a young woman terrified by what might be growing within her body. Plante takes this award for bad prose, although having a woman raped by a blob of purple and pink jelly scores a few points for...originality?

In Closing

There are undoubtedly worthy titles out there I've missed, but if so, I'm not sure I want to know. If it's any consolation to fans of the genre, the worst of science fiction is far worse. But sometimes I enjoy sitting down to watch a truly bad film, and sometimes there is nothing that makes a would-be writer feel better than to read something you absolutely know is worse than what you're sending around.

B

tions—from their homes—the burning of the flag atop the Capitol—the destruction of the Lincoln Tunnel—all those people hurled to their deaths after being hacked to pieces atop the Empire State building—all that was done by just six walking dead men?"

— *Dragon's Teeth*

"From now on I'm the hunch-backed avenger!" he muttered hissing.

"I'll get you for this, you human monster!" Quaine spat through his clenched teeth. (Next trick that.) — *The Hospital Horror*

"The next day the both of them got scripts and read the new scenes where Waldo is sleeping after a night out of killing and Wandessa creeps in, puts ether on a cone over his nose, of course

simulated ether, then has her fill on his neck. The rehearsals went off fine except some camera directions had to be changed so that when it was done over and over for the press and actually for the movie cameras it could be better seen." — *The Werewolf vs. Vampire Woman*

"It is a logical conclusion of the progress of humans through what they call science and believe to be the only truth to a lower state than they were originally created, and with far less understanding of the real truths of existence!" — *Draco the Dragon Man*

"The undulating growth of black filth hit the ground beneath the shattered window with a soggy 'thwacking' noise and squelched away, leaving particles

of odious slime adhering to jagged shards of broken glass—traces that quivered as if with an overwhelming urge to rejoin the departing spores. Some of them actually did manage to detach their viscous foulness, and moved swiftly after the shapeless blob as it flowed at incredible speed in the general direction of Booger's Marsh..."

— *Night of the Black Horror*

"Give an intelligent man a computer and a programmer, so that his questions can be turned into the kind of things the computer can handle, and he'll get to the bottom of most things, if his computer is big enough, and his programming device is flexible enough." — Choos

How *BAD* ARE LOVECRAFT'S REVISIONS?

BY
S.T. JOSHI

H.P. Lovecraft, as we all know, never made much money from original fiction, and had to support himself largely by what he called "revision"—revising or actually ghostwriting stories, poems, textbooks, and entire novels for a fee. In some cases this meant merely going over a manuscript and correcting points of style and grammar—what today would be termed copy editing. In other cases it amounted to wholesale composition from the skimpiest of notes or plot-germs. Because of Lovecraft's fame as a writer of weird fiction, would-be horror writers sent him manuscripts or plot ideas for revision. Over his lifetime Lovecraft revised or ghostwrote enough of these so that August Derleth could gather them into a volume, *The Horror in the Museum and Other Revisions* (1970). Over the last twenty years, however, several more revisions have come to light, so that when Arkham House asked me to produce a corrected edition of the volume, I was able to include these new tales in the second edition of 1989.

Lovecraft's revisions must be distinguished from his collaborations—those tales where he avowedly signed his name along with that of a coauthor. These include such early tales as "The Green Meadow" (c. 1918) and "The Crawling Chaos" (c. 1920), written with Winifred Virginia Jackson, and such a late story as "In the Walls of Eryx" (1936), written with Kenneth Sterling. Even though the process of composition was often similar in the revisions and the collaborations, the very fact that

Lovecraft's name would not appear on the former made a fundamental difference. Not only did he spend less effort in writing these revisions than he did writing a story bearing his name, but after a while he began to have some fun with them, throwing in references to his mythos and, in some cases, making the stories intentionally bad by abstract literary standards. Some of these tales were still successful in the pulp market, thereby confirming Lovecraft's opinion that pulpdom was a field of hacks, has-beens, and never-would-bes. It is amusing to note that some of the revisions were more popular with readers than his original stories.

It is difficult to decide what Lovecraft's first true revisions—as opposed to collaborations—are, since his early "revision clients" were all friends and associates who may or may not have paid him for his services. I suppose we have to start with "The Horror at Martin's Beach", written with or for Sonia Greene (his future wife) in 1922 and published in *Weird Tales* as "The Invisible Monster". It's pretty bad, although apparently (and unfortunately) not intentionally so; I was very glad to discover that Greene's other and still worse story, "Four O'Clock", which used to be considered a Lovecraft revision, was a story entirely conceived and written by Sonia, with HPL simply encouraging her along. I therefore had an excuse to remove it from my edition of *The Horror in the Museum and Other Revisions*, and I hope it quickly achieves the oblivion it so richly deserves.

My diligence in unearthing "new" Lovecraft revisions has, however, backfired on me, because it has led to the addition of one revision which I fervently wish had never been written, published, or acknowledged by HPL as his. This is "Ashes" by C. M. Eddy, Jr, a friend of Lovecraft's in Providence. It is Eddy's first *Weird Tales* story (it was published in the issue for March 1924), and if HPL had not admitted in a letter that he had helped fix it up, along with three other stories for Eddy ("The Ghost-Eater", "The Loved Dead", and "Deaf, Dumb and Blind"), no one would ever believe Lovecraft had had anything to do with it. In fact, I intentionally suppressed the story for years: I had hand-copied the tale around 1977 from a crumbling issue of *Weird Tales* in the John Hay Library of Brown University (the issue was so fragile that it could not be xeroxed), but refused to show it to anyone until Robert M. Price finally persuaded me to let it be reprinted in 1982. After that, I was forced to include it in the new edition of *The Horror in the Museum*.

"Ashes" is the dreadful story of a mad scientist who discovers a chemical compound that reduces everything it comes into contact with (except, conveniently, glass) into ashes. It is not entirely clear what purpose—aside from random destruction—this invention is supposed to serve, but the most awful part of the story is a nauseating romance between the scientist's assistant, Marjorie Purdy, and his friend Malcolm Bruce. Here's how Bruce tells it:

"The feel of her soft, yielding body held close to my own was the last straw. I cast prudence to the winds and crushed her tightly to my breast. Kiss after kiss I pressed upon her full red lips, until her eyes opened and I saw the lovelight reflected in them..."

"That night we gave over to the joys of our new-found happiness...I shall remember that night as long as I live! The happiest moment I have ever known was when Marjorie Purdy promised to become my wife."



The mere thought that Lovecraft had anything to do with this is revolting.

Speaking of revolting, we now come to "The Loved Dead", easily the most entertaining of the Eddy revisions. It may be worth noting that we very likely owe the continued existence of *Weird Tales* to this little necrophilic gem: when this story was published in the May-June-July 1924 issue, the magazine came close to being banned in certain parts of the country, and the notoriety caused by this incident essentially saved the magazine, which was thousands of dollars in debt at the time. "The Loved Dead" is, from beginning to end, a tongue-in-cheek parody of bad horror fiction. Some of it really is pretty objectionable, as when the narrator, whose fascination for death leads him to become an undertaker's assistant, embalms his own father's body, or when he takes to spending nights in the undertaker's morgue:

During long nights when I clung to the shelter of my sanctuary, I was prompted by the mausolean silence to devise new and unspeakable ways of lavishing my affections upon the dead that I loved—the dead that gave me life!

One morning Mr. Gresham came much earlier than usual—came to find me stretched out upon a cold slab deep in ghoulish slumber, my arms wrapped about the stark, stiff, naked body of a foetid corpse! He roused me from my salacious dreams, his eyes filled with mingled detestation and pity. Gently but firmly he told me that I must go...

Splatterpunks, eat your heart out!

One of the most peculiar ghostwriting jobs is "Under the Pyramids", commonly known as "Imprisoned with the Pharaohs". This, of course, is the tale which J.C. Henneberger, owner of *Weird Tales*, commissioned HPL to write for Harry Houdini, and which HPL wrote in the first person as if he were Houdini. It is rather amusing to see the mild-mannered Lovecraft writing as if he were "a performer of unexplained feats", but the narrator conforms to the standard Lovecraftian character-type by

fainting on at least three different occasions. He even pokes fun at himself for doing so: "Often I look back to that night and feel a touch of actual humour in those repeated lapses of consciousness; lapses whose succession reminded me at the time of nothing more than the crude cinema melodramas of that period."

But I maintain that "Under the Pyramids" is actually one of HPL's best revisions, and one of his better stories as a whole. The early parts of the tale, giving a description of the Egyptian pyramids, tend to read rather embarrassingly like a travelogue (and HPL, who of course never went to Egypt, probably pillaged much of the information from various guidebooks he had bought from the Metropolitan Museum of Art); but once the actual adventure begins, the story becomes riveting. Overwritten as it is, a passage like this is quite evocative:

I would not look at the marching things. That I desperately resolved as I heard their creaking joints and nitrous wheezing above the dead music and the dead tramping. It was merciful that they did not speak...but God! their crazy torches began to cast shadows on the surface of those stupendous columns. Heaven take it away! Hippopotami should not have human hands and carry torches...men should not have the heads of crocodiles...

Not much, however, can be said of the two stories revised by Lovecraft for Adolphe de Castro. De Castro was a friend of Ambrose Bierce—he collaborated with Bierce on *The Monk and the Hangman's Daughter* (1892)—and he published a volume of stories in 1893 called *In the Confessional and The Following*. Around 1927, de Castro got the brilliant idea of eliciting HPL's aid in resurrecting these stories for the pulp market, and so HPL was commissioned to rewrite de Castro's "A Sacrifice to Science" and "The Automatic Executioner"; he did so, retitling them "The Last Test" (1927) and "The Electric Executioner" (1929). The first story is extraordinarily bad. Although Lovecraft rewrote the entire story and expanded its plotting and motivation considerably, he kept the bare bones of the original scenario, which involved a conflict of wills between various characters. Now HPL, as we all know, was not much good at characterisation—his virtues are entirely elsewhere—and the result is a

plodding and wooden story full of cheap melodrama and pompous monologues. Of course, de Castro's original story is infinitely worse.

"The Electric Executioner" is a little more amusing, and this may be the first story where HPL began deliberately inserting references to his own mythos for fun. The narrator, menaced on a train in Mexico by a lunatic who wants to strap a hood on his head that will electrocute him, pretends to be possessed by a god, shouting: "Ya-R'lyeh! Ya-R'lyeh! Cthulhuti fhtaghn! Nigurati-Yig! Yog-Sototl!" (He gives these mythos names Aztec endings because of the Mexican locale.) I am not sure that this story is a deliberate self-parody, although it is rather amusing to watch the narrator's attempts to delay putting on the hood (he asks to write his will, then breaks a pencil, then says he should draw a picture of the invention, etc.); and the funniest thing about the story is that the character of the lunatic is based upon a real individual (a rather more innocuous one) whom HPL actually met on a train from New York to Washington in 1929.

At about the time Lovecraft was revising these dreadful tales for de Castro, he was ghostwriting several much better tales for Zealia Bishop. HPL wrote three stories for Bishop, "The Curse of Yig" (1928), "The Mound" (1929-30), and "Medusa's Coil" (1930), the first two of which are among his best revisions, and the second of which is a major Lovecraftian tale that can rank with his best original fiction. These tales are relatively successful largely because HPL had a virtually free hand with them: they were all based on the thinnest of plot-germs by Bishop (the plot-germ for "The Mound", a 25,000-word story, was this: "There is an Indian mound near here [i.e. Oklahoma], which is haunted by a headless ghost. Sometimes it is a woman"). "The Curse of Yig" is a compact and effectively grisly horror tale, but "The Mound" is a lavish and richly textured novelette with its fascinating picture of a decadent underground civilisation that has mastered the arts of telepathy and "dematerialisation" (the ability to dissolve one's body into its component atoms and recombine them at some other place—rather uncannily like the transporters in *Star Trek*).

"Medusa's Coil" is another matter. Peter

Cannon, who defends the tale, calls its conclusion "worthy of Faulkner on an off-day" (I'm not sure even this is much of a compliment, since Faulkner on an off day could be pretty lousy). To me it's more like Faulkner with a lobotomy.

This story involves a young man from an aristocratic Missouri family who meets and marries a seductive and mysterious woman in Paris named Marceline and brings her back home. This woman turns out to be a modern-day Medusa, as the coils of her hair come alive even after she is killed by her husband's friend; but, for Lovecraft, the big punchline—coming on top of a plethora of other supernatural shenanigans—is that, "though in deceitfully slight proportion, Marceline was a negress". For the racist Lovecraft, nothing could be more horrifying than miscegenation. This is how the tale ends, and August Derleth, in an attempt to preserve HPL's reputation, actually rewrote it like this: "though in deceitfully slight proportion, Marceline was a loathsome, bestial thing, and her forebears had come from Africa." Not much of an improvement.

I'm not criticising the story simply because it is racist; it has many other problems than that. First of all, like "The Last Test", it fails because the plot depends on vivid and realistic characters, which Lovecraft fails to provide. Secondly, as in some of HPL's own poorer stories, there is too much supernaturalism—too many weird and inexplicable things, which fail to harmonise into a coherent whole. I would very much like to believe that this story is some sort of parody, but from all accounts HPL took it quite seriously.

Parody, however, seems very much to enter HPL's revisions in the five stories he wrote for Hazel Heald. Robert M. Price was the first one to point out that all the Heald stories have basically the same plot—the idea of a living brain trapped inside an otherwise dead or paralysed body. This is all the more amusing in that HPL was fond of abusing some of his fellow pulpsmiths for their repetitive plots, referring to Edmond Hamilton as "Single-Plot

Hamilton" (or, more nastily, "Hectograph Eddie"). The five Heald stories—"The Man of Stone", "Winged Death", "The Horror in the Museum", "Out of the Aeons", and "The Horror in the Burying-Ground"—all seem to have been

written around 1932 and 1933, although some did not get published until years later. And all, clearly, were based on very sketchy plot-germs by Heald, so that whatever virtues or flaws there are in them are all attributable to HPL.

"The Man of Stone"—the only piece of HPL's writing ever to appear in *Wonder Stories*—is simply a fair-to-middling pulp story. "The Horror in the Museum", however, is very

clearly a parody of Lovecraft's own mythos. Here we have a hideous god, Rhan-Tegoth, which an expedition discovers in a frozen state in some Cyclopean ruins in Alaska. This expedition—picture this—packs the god up and takes it back to a museum in London. The curator of the museum, George Rogers, seems like a madman, but when he dares his sceptical friend Stephen Jones to spend the night alone in the basement of the museum, the latter actually comes upon Rhan-Tegoth as it bursts from its confinement:

Even as he reflected, a fresh evidence of madness beset him. Something, he thought, was fumbling with the latch of the heavy padlocked door. It was patting and pawing and pushing at the planks. There was a thudding on the stout wood, which grew louder and louder. The stench was horrible. And now the assault on that door from the inside was a malign, determined pounding like the strokes of a battering ram. There was an ominous cracking—a splintering—a weiling factor—a falling plank—a black paw ending in a crab-like claw.

"Help! Help! God help me! ...Aaaaaa!..."

One can just imagine HPL chuckling as he writes this; but the last laugh was on him. When this story appeared in *Weird Tales* for July 1933 (in the same issue as his own "Dreams in the Witch House"), a reader wrote in to the letter column some months later and praised the story, remarking: "Even Lovecraft—

Joshi's Judgements on Lovecraft's Lamest

"The Horror at Martin's Beach"

"Ashes"

"The Loved Dead"

"The Last Test"

"The Electric Executioner"

"Medusa's Coil"

"Winged Death"

"The Diary of Alonzo Typer"

as powerful and artistic as he is with macabre suggestiveness—could hardly, I suspect, have surpassed the grotesque scene in which the other-dimensional shambler leaps out upon the hero." No doubt HPL thought he had written a trashy and lurid tale for the pulp market—but he succeeded all too well!

Some of the other Heald stories, like "Out of the Aeons" and "The Horror in the Burying-Ground", are rather good, even if the latter rips off HPL's own first sentence of "The Dunwich Horror": "When the state highway to Rutland is closed, travellers are forced to take the Stillwater road past Swamp Hollow." But I suppose HPL is allowed to plagiarise his own work. As for "Winged Death", it presents us with the preposterous picture of a man whose soul or personality becomes transferred into that of a fly, and it writes the following message on the ceiling of a hotel room by dipping its body repeatedly in an inkwell, then commits suicide by plunging itself into a bottle of ammonia:

"SEE MY JOURNAL—IT GOT ME FIRST—
OIED—THEN I SAW I WAS IN IT—
THE BLACKS ARE RIGHT—STRANGE POWERS IN
NATURE—NOW I WILL DROWN WHAT IS
LEFT—"

Quite an industrious fly.

"Winged Death" is one of many stories which end with the characters making histrionic final utterances before dispatching themselves. HPL resorts to this much more in his revisions than in his original stories, and I am praying that he realised the absurdity of the procedure and was using it paradoxically. I think there is no doubt of this in Lovecraft's last revision, "The Diary of Alonzo Typer".

The story was written for William Lumley, a half-educated occultist for whom HPL seems to have developed a remarkable liking. Lumley produced an incoherent and ungrammatical story called "The Diary of Alonzo Typer: Found after his mysterious disappearance [sic]", the manuscript of which still survives. HPL felt so sorry for Lumley and his hopeless story that he rewrote the entire thing: the title became very ironic, since HPL's handwritten scrawl was so illegible that he was forced to type it himself. HPL has, of course, improved the tale, but not by much. The ending is not to be believed. We are presented with the diary of a man who has

stumbled into a haunted house in the wilds of New York state; here is his last entry:

"Too late—cannot help self—black paws
materialise—I am dragged away toward the
cellar..."

Here is a fellow who is being carried off by some nameless entity, and yet he valiantly writes away to the bitter end!

Perhaps Lovecraft's revisions seem so bad precisely because we are constantly comparing them to his own stories. Taken on their own, as stories written for the pulp market, most of them are neither any better nor any worse than the average story in *Weird Tales*, and several—like "The Mound" and "Out of the Aeons"—are considerably better. We all know that Lovecraft scorned the pulp world and found it distasteful to have to be published there; but he had no choice, as there was no market for literate weird fiction in his day. Will Murray has recently claimed that Lovecraft sought out many more pulp markets—from *Mystery Stories* to *Terror Tales*—than we think, and to some extent this is true. Murray goes on to say that, although Lovecraft vowed that he could never write "for the pulps", he did so very well in his revisions. This may also be true in some cases, although it should be noted that such a distinctive tale as "The Mound" was not published until a decade after its writing, and then only in abridged form. But Lovecraft never catered to pulp standards in his original fiction, and this aesthetic integrity is a large reason for his current high standing in the field. If he had written nothing but the revisions, or stories like the revisions, which were intentionally tailored to the pulp market, we would have very little reason to remember him.

B

Curse Of The Fanthorpes

By
MIKE ASHLEY

Some while ago, editor Bob Morrish asked me if I'd write about some of the worst or most humorous horror fiction I have encountered.

When asked something like that the mind instantly fills with a thousand ghastly visions, not ones of heart-stopping horror but more of eye-wincing disbelief. I'm sure all of us have seen, heard or read more than our fair share of garbage and never wish to be reminded of it. But some, a thin layer of surface mold, you have to begrudging admire. Not for its quality, but for its total lack of it, and the gall of the author for getting away with it.

After Bob had asked me that question my mind very rapidly focused on one man, the only man I know who managed to produce a complete library of humorous horrors, and yet a man that I have to say is a delight to be with, and who successfully milked a system that was developed to deliver such crud. That man was Robert Lionel Fanthorpe.

I could write at length about Lionel, but I won't, as I have done that elsewhere, and true devotees of the Badger Books science fiction and supernatural series will no doubt have encountered my slim volume about them. Suffice it to say that in producing the bulk of these two series Lionel was, and may well still be, the most prolific writer of science fiction and horror.

I don't intend to survey the whole series of *Supernatural Stories* here, nor even the whole of Lionel's contribution to it. But I want to

focus on Lionel's humor and how. At the end of the series, Lionel went out with a bang.

You need only know the following by way of background. *Supernatural Stories* was published by the firm of John Spencer who commissioned stories in bulk from their limited stable of writers. They paid only about ten shillings (then about \$2) per thousand words, so that a novel of fifty thousand words—their upper limit—brought in only £25 (*Editor's guess: roughly \$12.50?*). Just as in the days of the old pulp writers, to earn any cash at all it was necessary to write fast.

Supernatural Stories had started as a digest-sized magazine back in 1954, and at that time the bulk of its contents were written by John S. Glasby under a squad of pen names. By 1957, though, the series had metamorphosed into a paperback book, and Lionel had become the mainstay writer. The series appeared roughly monthly, but by 1959 it started a policy of alternating a novel with a story collection. Sometimes these appeared concurrently.

By the early sixties, therefore, Fanthorpe was getting into the habit of writing a novel in a weekend, or a story in an evening. He kept this up for some six years, producing a phenomenal amount of material. These also appeared under a squad of pen names, most of them partial anagrams of his own full name. Thus we had Bron Fane, Trebor Thorpe, Pel Torro, Leo Brett, René Rolant, Elton T. Neef, Olaf Trent, Neil Thanet, Robin Tate, and the

exception to the rule, Deutero Spartacus.

To give Lionel his due, some of the stories are still quite readable, as occasionally he would get a good idea and be somewhat restrained over its use. But that wasn't his normal style. Lionel is a muscular, burly, bearded, very jolly man with a hearty laugh, the inevitable twinkle in the eye, and a decidedly rogish smile. Whilst he can be very serious, especially in his former profession as a schoolmaster (later head teacher) and in his current vocation as a priest, Fanthorpe would, more often than not, try and make fun of most things he did and get enjoyment out of anything.

Consequently, and probably wise for his sanity, he never took the *Supernatural Stories* series seriously. He wrote most of his stories for laughs, and if they are read on that basis they can be quite entertaining.

By 1966 the publishers of *Supernatural Stories* sensed a change in the market and decided to move away to produce other things. Commissioned to produce the final few volumes, Lionel Fanthorpe decided to go for broke. And so we come to "Curse of the Khan," the last story Lionel wrote, and the one where he sought his writing revenge on all that he had had to do.

In the blurb, which Lionel also wrote, on the back of *Supernatural Stories* 105, it states:

Curse of the Khan by leading supernatural author R. Lionel Fanthorpe is the story of the rise and fall of the Mongol Empire...but there is an ingenious occult explanation for it.

You might want to cling on to that plot summary as we work our way through the story. It may be the only sense you get.

The story begins with the first person narrator, Fanthorpe himself, sitting in his study one summer's evening searching for inspiration. He gets none from a survey of the mantelpiece, but then the door bell rings. He opens the door to find a tall, muscular Mongol (or Tartar, he's not sure) warrior standing there brandishing a sword.

After the initial fright, Fanthorpe decides it must be a joke. But, as he mused, "With that sword and those muscles I knew I had to hit him first and hit him hard—preferably with a

spanner."

But then the warrior laughs. He is there to convey a message and he hands Fanthorpe a small white card. Thereupon he steps back into the darkness of the shrubbery and disappears.

Fanthorpe locks and bolts the two front doors, all the time wondering whether it was a publicity stunt and he had won a prize. Or, maybe he was selling yogurt, he muses. He looks at the card:

You are invited to take part in a test of skill, courage and intelligence by challenging Genghis Khan and his associates at Black Island Manor, off Vervan Bay.

After a moment's hesitation and a quick check of a guide book, Fanthorpe is in his car and away, and an overnight's drive brings him to Vervan.

Vervan, by the way, does exist. I've been there myself on holiday. It's a beautiful village, though it's a mile or so inland, not on the coast as Fanthorpe has it here, and it has no harbor, and there is no Black Island. Those facts aside, the story would otherwise have a ring of veracity about it.

Fanthorpe drinks coffee with a peg-legged old sailor who offers to take him out to Black Island. Fanthorpe learns that he's the fifth man to be taken there in the last two days, all men with a similar "look" about them. The boat trip is uneventful, and Fanthorpe lands on Black Island, a grim, forbidding place where both Frankenstein's monster and Dracula would be well at home.

He's met by a dour Welshman who turns out to be fellow author Oben Lerteth. Other writers Peter O'Flinn, Neil Balfort and Bron Fane are also there. "Somebody seems to be collecting authors," Fanthorpe grins.

The island has an old ruined manor house and Fanthorpe meets the others in the "saloon",



where they are playing cards. Everyone is a perfect stereotyped character. Bron Fane is big and bluff, Lerteth is a loner and thin as a rapier, Fanthorpe is a gregarious part-time wrestler, and so on. In fact Fanthorpe and Lerteth have a disagreement about their life-styles, and when Lerteth comments that he

"needs to be alone", Fanthorpe refrains, "with an effort...from the obvious, puerile crack about deodorants, which flashed unbidden across the screen of consciousness. It dropped back disgruntledly into the mental saloon-bar sploot where I store most of my jokes." Now you know what you've let yourself in for.

A message in the saloon tells them "When all are ready I will come

to you—Genghis Khan."

They pass the time playing cards, and others steadily arrive. Elton T. Neef, "the Manhattan Magus", arrives in a "luminous white tuxedo", a vast Stetson, check shirt and green trousers, bursting into the room with a "Well I'll be doggoned!" René Rolant turns up by helicopter, because he has no passport. He has a bullet scar on his cheek and an air of the aging playboy rebel about him. His eyes "flashed like sparking plugs."

They all compare notes and discover all were given a white card by the aggressive-looking but laughing warrior sometime over the last day or two, but they remain baffled at how this character has moved around the world in the short space of time.

They hear a further sound of galloping hoofs, but see nothing. Then a voice from inside the manor declares, "I'm waiting, gentlemen." They venture back into the saloon, led by "square-jawed" Bron Fane, and there they espy Genghis Khan sitting beside a packing case of Golden Drop plums. Fanthorpe fights back a laugh. "The whole damned thing was so incongruous," he feels, and memories come

back to him of films like *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*.

They sit around the Khan, some more boldly than others, and the Khan thanks them for coming. He explains that he is bored, having been cursed with immortality. There follows a long expostulation by the Khan, who was really only a Khan at one time; he was banished to Earth from a planet around Aldebaran, in the days of Lemuria. He explains how over the centuries he has tired of life, and has a thousand times tried to find death.

"I have tasted the champagne of volcanoes, the claret of war, the dry graves of famine, the absinthe of the earthquake and the liqueur of fire...These hands have embraced lepers. Once I kissed a woman dying of small-pox. I have clasped plague victims as though they were long lost brothers. I have swum in sewers in the hope of infection; I have leapt into whirlpools and maelstroms. I have flung myself under chariots and gathered armfuls of spears to my body, as other men might gather rosebuds. I have drunk poison that could corrode the Alps. Yet I remain as you see me now...trapped in a body that cannot die."

After this tirade Fanthorpe is the first to respond:

"A lot of men would be grateful..."

It is Neil Balfort, the oldest of the group, who eventually determines the Khan's problem. "You have satiated your desire for sex and conflict, there is nothing left except the problem of passing time."

To ease his boredom the Khan has arranged for a contest for the seven men. He explains:

"I have seven creations to oppose your team. I shall introduce them to you and then throw a force field around the island for twenty-four hours. At the end of that period I shall return. If you have survived, you have won and there the matter will end. If you lose...the matter will also be ended...you will be dead."

He brings forth the seven entities one at a time, held in individual force fields so that the authors can see their opposition. After a set of stereotyped internationals we now have a set of stereotypical monsters. First comes a zom-

ble, then a vampire, a werewolf, a ghou, a ghost (a headless Ann Boleyn to be precise), a witch and a troll. Alas, not a Frankenstein's Monster, King Kong or Godzilla amongst them.

The Khan then removes the restraining

force fields and the battle starts.

The men flee. As they rush out into the grounds Fanthorpe remembers he had been appointed leader of the group and was supposed to plan the tactics. He recalls his school football matches and shouts to the others to mark a man. "I'll take the troll!" he shouts, even though his shoulders only came up to the troll's kneecaps.

As they all dart about the gardens trying to avoid the lumbering monsters, Fanthorpe calls out to the others. "René - take the vampire." "Oui, mon vieux," comes the obvious response. "Bron, get the werewolf." "Roger," replies our bluff hero. "Neil, will you take the witch?" comes the next polite request. "I'll do ma best, th' nool!" he replies. The next paragraph denies any paraphrasing:

He walked toward the hag like a determined marine engineer approaching the jammed safety valve of a gigantic boiler which is nearing explosion point, his attitude was confident, but it was a grim confidence. Before I could see the outcome of their encounter the ghoul took a spring at the copper-haired Irishman, "I'll take this one, bejabbers," exclaimed O'Flinn, and sulking the word to the deed struck savagely at the blemished morehead with his shillelagh.

Neef calls out that he'd like to tackle the zombie and the two vanish into the shrubbery together, whilst Lerteth resigns himself at dealing with the headless ghost.

Fanthorpe wonders how he can combat the troll. He tries reasoning with it, and the discussion soon moves on to the state of the troll's teeth, and his failure to use toothpaste. All this

time, Fanthorpe is seeking to distract the troll from noticing the approaching cliff's edge, until at the last second Fanthorpe drops over the edge, clinging to the cliff face, and the troll, who makes a dash for Fanthorpe, sails over the cliff onto the rocks below, hitting them "with a noise like a haggis falling from Glamis Castle during the Hogmanay celebration." Fanthorpe has all the mastery of the English language at his disposal.

Clambering up from the cliff he finds Rolant at battle with the vampire. The vampire is amazed to learn that Fanthorpe has defeated the troll and turns on him with a series of dives and swoops which Fanthorpe feigns off using a coat like a matador's cloak. Rolant, in the meantime, finds a stake in the grounds, and with a final duck for safety Fanthorpe lures the vampire on to the stake.

Rolant and Fanthorpe now find Bron Fane fighting the werewolf—an Austrian werewolf, by the way, not any old one—in a raging fury. They throw themselves into the fray, and Rolant suggests that someone uses his silver tie pin. Fane removes it (it isn't explained how), but the werewolf redoubles its efforts and Fanthorpe is thrown into the rhododendrons. Luckily, as a trained wrestler, he knows how to fall. In that split second, Bron Fane had struck and slaughtered the werewolf with the tie pin. (James Bond has nothing on these guys.)

They now encounter the final moments of the battle between Balfort and the witch. Descended from a long-line of witch-hunter Balforts he has the power within him to hate a witch to death. The hatred has grown so intense—pure white hatred—that the witch has burst into flames.

As the four have a philosophical discussion about the nature of hatred, O'Flinn turns up shouting "Bejabbers and bedad! I've got him, so I have!" O'Flinn had recalled an ancient Irish exorcism that resulted



FANTASY READERS GUIDE



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Mike Ashley's Guide to Spencer (and Fanthorpe)

in the ghoul shriveling in upon itself like a snail.

Neef turns up, full of over-the-top explanations. He had had a tough tussle with the zombie. It had looked at him all mean-like, well, not exactly looked, as it hadn't any eyes, but "there was multi-colored murder in the way he carried his head on that rickety neck..."

Neef had first shot the zombie till he was like a walking colander, but he kept on coming. He then flattened him under a stone slab, but...no luck. Then he hit him with a lump of wood...nope. He kept on slugging him until bits started to drop off—but then they simply "reformed". So Neef determined to keep the bits apart, and using the lump of wood like a baseball bat, he knocked the zombie bit-by-bit down a well.

One monster was left, the headless ghost, against which Lerteth was fighting his own solitary battle. His weapon was words. He read the ghost some of his poetry (which had won third prize at the 1939 Eisteddfod—junior section) and she found it so dreadful that with one shriek she vanished.

So the seven had won. The Khan reappeared and declared a satisfactory victory and vanished. And that's the end. The story just stops there.

But hang on. Wasn't there something about the rise and fall of the Mongol Empire And an occult explanation? Oh hang all that. Who wants occult history when you can bore a ghost to death with poetry?

When I reminded Lionel of this story some years ago, he gave out a hearty belly laugh. He had such fun writing it, and felt that if Spencer's were mad enough to publish stuff like that, they deserved all they got. Believe it or not, Spencer's are still going, and *Supernatural Stories* is now becoming very collectible. If "Curse of the Khan" whetted your appetite, there's another ten years' worth where that came from.

g



Don't Lose Your Head!

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HIS LIFE TURNED INTO A SCREAMING NIGHTMARE!!!

OR

A COMPREHENSIVE LOOK AT THE FRANKENSTEIN HORROR SERIES

by
Peter Infantino

Elsewhere in this lousy issue, you'll find the honorable Don D'Amassa take on a whole slew of putrid fiction. In short order, he slaughters three of the nine novels published by Popular Library as *The Frankenstein Horror Series (FHS)*. I tend to agree that as brain food, *FHS* represents 1,749 pages of wasted timber (but in perspective, that's almost three Dean Koontz novels, so not much of a waste, comparatively), but I think Don might be missing the joke on at least one of these (maybe two, we'll see).

Popular Library published nine volumes of *FHS* in 1972 and 1973. Despite a recurring rumor that the series was edited by mystery and movie tie-in author Michael Avallone (who also wrote at least one of the books), the series was apparently edited by Popular Library staff editor James T. Bryans. Edited in the loosest sense possible, I might add, as most of the books contain clichéd characters, ho-hum plots borrowed from old flicks, and laughable dialogue and interaction (not to mention the most typos I've ever seen). Another common thread that runs through most of the series was the repeated use of weak women. The kind that use to cower behind their men in those '50s SF clunkers, or serve as window dressing when our hero needs to pucker up.

The majority of the nine novels borrow heavily (read: rip-off) from other genre material, be it '50s monster movies (*The Marrow Eaters*), mummy movies (*The Curse of Quintana Roo*), Lovecraft (*Night of the Wolf*), or you name it (*The Hospital Horror*). Many of the novels deal with the "curse from beyond the grave" or the "defilement of the ancient tomb."

Most also dealt with bad prose. Even the synopsis of the series was z-grade writing:

"The Frankenstein Horror Series is a group of entirely new stories that follows the fates of the primal monsters and their heirs, as they re-emerge from the Pit of the Unknown, the Unspeakable, and the Undead."

Huh? I don't have access to exact release dates, but if ISBN numbers are any indication, *The Frankenstein Wheel* by Paul W. Fairman was the first of the nine to be published. Fairman was a well-respected SF writer, known primarily for a pair of TV tie-ins, *City Under the Sea* (from the VOYAGE TO THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA series) and *The World Grabbers* ("inspired" by ONE STEP BEYOND), and a collection of horror stories called *The Doomsday Exhibit*. Fairman's entry in the *FHS* is a very effective sequel to Mary Shelley's novel, with a lot of obvious homages to the Universal film series (the bride, the one-armed mayor, the kidnapped child, the burned-out castles, etc.). The monster has survived his self-imposed imprisonment in ice, and returns to Frankenstein's hometown, seeking a mate. The creature has the good doctor's notes on creating life, and builds his own babe.



Meanwhile, two Englishmen—one a bored and wealthy member of royalty, the other a tormented man wracked with guilt for not destroying the monster years before—join forces to track down the elusive ogre. The monster gets his mate, but the relationship becomes akin to that of the title couple in Danny DeVito's biting *WAR OF THE ROSES*. What's good for the goose is good for the gander becomes the moral of Fairman's monster story, and it becomes clear that Karloff's monster in *BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN* got off easy by destroying his wife real quick.

Fairman keeps his story at a steady pace, not leaving the reader time to question the characters' motives (the two main protagonists track the monster across two continents for the adventure of it, despite the incredible danger), and manages to add a few good twists to the Frankenstein legend along the way. Much like Stephen King in *Pet Sematary*, Fairman hypothesizes that the monster is not inherently evil, but rather became evil by facing "the other side" after death. All-in-all, a very impressive start to a series. Too bad, this novel was not indicative of things to come.

In contrast, Frank Belknap Long's *Night of the Wolf* is an absolute disaster, a crashing bore from page one through to the cheat ending. *Night of the Wolf* centers around a professor who is murdered in his study by a strange wolf-creature. The rest of the book follows his colleagues and daughter as they hunt the monster down. In a werewolf novel, you'd expect maybe a werewolf? Think again. Long's wolf stays "offscreen" until the last chapter of the book, and then is dispatched almost offhandedly as an aside. We never find out much about the character who becomes the wolfman, only subtle hints. The book also suffers from Long's Lovecraftian rip-off prose:

"No scream could have appalled me more, for there is an extremity of terror and physical pain that the human voice never fails to record, whether frenziedly high-pitched or harsh and deep-throated."

It makes sense that Long would write like H.P., since he belonged to the famed Lovecraft Circle, but that doesn't make his writing any more palatable. Easily the worst werewolf novel I've read.

Incredibly enough though, *Wolf* isn't the worst book in the *FHS*. That honor goes to Matt Gardner's *The Curse of Quintana Roo*, an incredibly boring, badly written, thinly disguised rip-off of the old Universal mummy movies of the 40s. Again, an intrepid band of scientists lets loose a Pandora's Box of evil by opening up an ancient tomb containing the Mayan "hell-creature" Rahu. But unlike the Lon Chaney mummy, Rahu doesn't shamble

about killing dopey scientists and scaring pretty girls. This rotting roll of band-aids has an army of corpses do his bad business for him. But the real secret of this army is that when the corpses are destroyed, they let off a noxious vapor that reels the senses...

"An odor. A stench that incited regurgitation."

"A vomitory stench?"

"Yes! That is it exactly. A vomitory stench. The men were incapacitated by hysterical vomiting due to this stench!"

Before too long, the hero finds out that Rahu isn't just raising a ruckus because he's bored. Moons and stars and all those gooey signs have



lined up for the first time in God knows how long, and Rahu aims to make some whoopee. Coincidentally, the female scientist of the book happens to be the goddess that Mayan legends foretold would mate with Rahu (and make little mummies?). The first meeting between ancient deity and modern-day babe is a hoot...

"When I happened to glance down (into) the sarcophagus...That's when I saw it! A—thing in more or less human form...with two wildly-bulging bloodshot eyes glaring at me in...in..."

She paused, a tremor coursing through her. "—in hot, repulsive lust!"

Not just lust, but hot, repulsive lust. Lucky

thing these scientists brought lots of firepower, because it's somewhat doubtful this Mayan princess could have handled two thousand years of pent-up sexual frustration. About the only interesting thing to report about this book is that it's told in first-person, and the narrator has the same name as the author.

Robert Moore Williams' *Seven Tickets to Hell*

is a quirky, awkward story that starts out very promisingly, but soon trips over its own pulpy feet. The title refers to the mythical Seven Stones of Tardus, which, when brought together, grant the possessor the powers of a god. The novel is unique in that it is written in a second-person narrative, not for one, but two characters (and in a weird twist, a stone idol briefly at the climax). This sets up a couple of confusing passages along the way, but altogether the narrative works as much more than just a novelty. In fact, at times, it works on the level Williams must have been striving for: to put the reader in the action. The two main characters, a narc and a professor pursue two separate paths relating to the stones, a path that eventually leads them to the same destination. Along the way they encounter undead soldiers, invisible warlocks, the mafia, and giant carnivorous

worms. Which amounts to a little too much danger for one book. The effect becomes overkill, and (as with most of the FHS) after all this immense peril, the heroes walk off into the sunset at the climax. The writing itself is competent (stellar compared to *Wolf* and *Quintana*), but there's not a lot of suspense, and the whole package comes off as something that would have run in *Amazing Stories* in the 30s.

Much like *The Frankenstein Wheel*, Robert Trillins' *Ghoul Lover* describes the obsession of a country-hopping professor. Dr. Karl von Kosel discovers a method to bring back the dead through astral projection and his patented formula, elan vital (which would probably go over well at one of those yuppie bars). While demonstrating this technique he falls in love with a disembodied spirit named Elena. The

"Don't come near me—you're some sort of a ghoul!"

—from *Ghoul Lover*

girl informs von Kosel she is to be born soon, and that he should come and join her once she lays her hands on her new body. In the meantime von Kosel works on perfecting his serum of life. He buys nice little castles and stocks them with hot and cold-running zombie servants (unfortunates who happened to get in his way). But the nutty professor can't quite get his formula right, so he leaves a trail of stumbling, bumbling, rotting killer zombies all the way from Germany to Florida.

In one stunning sequence (reminiscent of *The Three Stooges*), his manservant Otto (who, in short order, becomes a zombie manservant) expresses displeasure with the doctor's techniques. One of von Kosel's early experiments had gone whacko, and Otto had threatened to bail out unless the mon-



ster was destroyed. Von Kosel lets the monster loose and assures Otto of its destruction. Outside their window still one morning, a paper boy yells "Extra, Extra. Bayou monster kills again!"

I'll let Trailins tell you the rest...

"What are they shouting?" Otto said.

"It's nothing, nothing at all," von Kosel said.

Otto rose from the chair and went to the window. "You boy," he called, "bring a paper up here."

Von Kosel was at Otto's side. "No need for that, Otto. We've an important matter to discuss..."

"Why are you trying to stop me from buying a newspaper?"

Ah, scintillating prose, that. Needless to say, von Kosel eventually does run across his beloved, Elena, but life ain't that bed of roses she's been promising. For one thing, the doctor has to wait 22 years for her body to mature (Elena is definitely against pedophilia, she has her morals after all), and when that gorgeous body does mature, it catches TB and quickly dies, leaving von Kosel in a quandry. Resuscitate or find another available chick at his advanced age and declining pocketbook. The choice is not pretty. *Ghoul Lover* is your basic, by-the-numbers, poorly-written astral projection voodoo love story.

Michael Avallone's entry in the series, *The Beast With the Red Hands*, is snooze-writing at its peak. Protagonist Hollis Waring has a thing for strangling red-headed nurses, and every once in a while (when he's sexually frustrated?)

Nurse Donderson. Why hadn't she left him alone? Why had she come to him with her awful perversions, her great, smelly thighs, her basketball-sized breasts and mountainous buttocks? Why had she made him act like a licking dog? A dirty little mongrel eating scraps, losing himself in degradation. And never-ending shame.

— from *The Beast With the Red Hands*

he turns into a monster. A red-handed monster. Avallone always lets you know when a

character only has a few hours to live. A couple examples?

On the morning she was about to die...no one looked more alive than Linda Chase, Registered Nurse.

Or:

Also like Linda Chase, she had no time left at all.

Normally preludes like these would naturally destroy the suspense factor, but Avallone's characters are all stock cardboard, created only to die, like Jason's teens in *FRIDAY THE 13TH* installment (ironically, Avallone would later write one of those lame *FRIDAY THE 13TH* movie novelizations). Further, a lot of the sentences are overly melodramatic, written as though Criswell should be reading them aloud:

As for Mrs. Laurence, she had no way of knowing she was knitting a sweater for a monster. A fiend on Earth.

There is one amusing passage in the book (in a novel sorely lacking in the humor department). When the town is reduced to one red-headed nurse, the cops stick to her like glue. Did anyone think to tell this lady to dye her hair? Too easy? I know if I had red hair and some nutty seven foot beast was stalking me, I'd talk to my hairdresser pronto.

Unlike most of the entries in the *FHS* (even the badly written books), *Beast* isn't a lot of fun, nor is it any good.

Harris Moore's *The Marrow Eaters* concerns a group of scientists (led by Dr. Fisher) who unleash a giant man-like creature who stalks the desert for readily available prey.



The thing rips apart its victims and drinks the marrow from the bones. Turns out the creature is a long-dormant scientist from a race that walked Earth eons before man. The scientist

It kinda growled...like it was mad. Oh, and it had clothes on—but all ragged."

"Clothes?"

"Yeah. And it smelled—it smelled awful"

— from The Marrow Eaters

had invented a wonder drug which would enable him to become immortal, but had a few bad side effects. Now the creature is searching for a pendant that had been entombed with it below the desert. That pendant now belongs to the daughter of Dr. Fisher, and the monster treks across the desert to find her. Destroying cars, setting fires, maiming and marrowing, and in one particularly laughable scene, proving he's too big a man to walk *around* the town's bowling alley.

The obligatory Indian medicine man is introduced to save the day in an incredibly rushed and dangling climax. The reader never really finds out how the creature is killed. But aside from the cheat ending, there are a couple of moments of real suspense, notably when the monster attacks three men at a diner and when Dr. Fisher meets his maker. The reader could complain that all the characters (especially the whiney daughter) are made of plywood rather than flesh and blood, and Moore always sets up the creature's kills by introducing the sec-

"To hurl a flaming firebrand at immobilized patients...it's fiendish! Can't they stop that Hunchback Horror?"

— from The Hospital Horror

ondary characters approximately three paragraphs before dispatching them. If nothing else, a decent time-waster when you're in the mood for something lighter than Doestevsky, but heavier than the latest John Saul.

A mysterious and deadly "shadow" is stalking the halls of Clinic Center in *The Hospital*

Horror by ace hack Otto Binder. The shadow is in reality the hunchbacked Renolf LeClaire, "the architect who had that unfortunate accident." Seems LeClaire had a run-in with a crane on the newly-developed hospital site (he was the designer of the building) that left him a little "scrunched up." LeClaire doesn't take his new position in life very well, blaming Dr. Quentin Q. Quaine (who operated on LeClaire) for his handicap. LeClaire hatches a plan of revenge against the young doctor.

"From now on I'm the hunchbacked avenger. And my target is Dr. Quentin Quaine, the quack who changed me from a man to a freak!"

It's only after the mad hunchback makes an attempt on Quaine's life at an award ceremony (the award naturally going to Quentin), that Quaine sees his lab assistant Lynne Carlisle as the beautiful and sensuous young lady that she is. He narrowly escapes death (in an obvious homage to Leroux's *Phantom of the Opera*) and then quickly asks Lynne to lunch. Lynne dreamily sums up that if nothing else good comes from the hunchback horror, at least it's brought the two together at last. Rather than kill Dr. Quaine, the hunchback decides to torture him by terrorizing Clinic Center. Poor Quaine only wants to perfect Substance X, a miracle drug that can do something special, but God only knows what, since Quaine will only drop hints here and there. The hunchback finds out about Substance X and quickly absconds it, hoping it will cure his embarrassing predicament. He is captured and escapes approximately 300 times throughout the length of the book, in the process hijacking first an ambulance, and later a small plane to get at Substance X.

In a fierce struggle aboard the plane (rivaling anything out of *INDIANA JONES*), the hunchback goes skydiving without a parachute, taking the green goo with him. But as



we've learned already, all is not what it seems. In an incredibly silly scene (one of the most outlandish I've ever had the pleasure to read), LeClaire uses his cape as a parachute to slow himself down and executes a perfect swan dive into a conveniently placed lake!

In a nail-biting climax, "The Hospital Horror" is struck by lightning while trying (once again) to escape and Lynne and Quentin are left to debate just how much they love each other. *The Hospital Horror* reads like something rejected from a 1940s pulp magazine: each sentence punctuated with an exclamation; liberally doused with dialogue like "Is he some evil being—from another dimension? Or from some unknown occult realm?"; and descriptive scenes such as "The caped figure stood erect, chuckling horribly, but not too loudly."

This is absolutely pulp writing at its worst. That said, the novel has a certain charm and it never lags. In a way, it's the prose equivalent of PLAN NINE FROM OUTER SPACE. How can you resist a story with deep-felt writing like:

"You're not a quack" retorted LeClaire evenly. "You see, when Lynne Carlsile told me the truth about Substance X, I realized, how I had dug my own pit by not listening to your proposition at the start. The shock of that thought straightened it all out for me. Cobwebs seemed to drop away from my mind. I saw clearly then that you were not a quack and not responsible for my condition. Aren't you happy about that?"

"Not very," muttered Quaine. "In other words, the scales of psychotic blindness have dropped from your eyes. You see things straight now. But you are crazy if you think that after the operation, you can escape all the criminal charges against you. Or else hope for an insanity plea which will still incarcerate you for life in a mental ward, and..."

A novel way to talk a criminal into giving himself up, no?

Finally, we come to the book that Don D'Amassa and I strongly disagree on. It's not that *Dragon's Teeth* by Keith Miles (the last book to be released under the *Frankenstein Horror Series* banner) is great literature (or even good literature, for that matter), but it's a fun read. Unlike *The Hospital Horror*, which is a badly-written, but fun book, I truly believe *Teeth* was written by a smart guy, a writer who knew he was stuck in a series full of mediocrity and decided therefore to plant his tongue firmly in cheek. Let me tell you a little about this goofy book, and then you can decide. Another troop of scientists, featuring the lovely Julie Chambers, is exploring the mysterious cave that houses the ancient tomb of Chitimacha. One of the professors meets up with an ancient shaman dressed in wolfskins deep in the cave. The shaman explains that he is there to resurrect the undead warriors of the fourteen Indian

FHS Facts

A few interesting tidbits about the *Frankenstein Horror Series*:

- 8 of the 9 covers were painted by Gray Morrow, an artist best known for his work in Warren magazines such as *Creepy* and *Eerie*. The 9th cover (*Dragon's Teeth*) was painted by Jeff Jones, a very popular artist who also worked for Warren. Most of the covers had little if nothing to do with the story itself, so maybe just a title was given to the artist by the publisher.

- *The Vampire Women* by Victor Samuels (sporting a nice Jeff Jones cover) was published in 1973 by Popular Library. Except for the missing banner across the top of the book, this looks like it should have been part of the series. Perhaps it was planned to be before Pop. Library discontinued the series.

- For some reason the binding on these books is horrible. They tend to fall apart before you get done with one reading. Check the binding before shelling out.

- This series is incredibly collectible right now. Recently four of the *FHS* were offered up for bid by Best Condition Books. *Hospital* went for \$17, *Ghoul Lover* for \$11, *Red Hots* got \$13, while *Dragon's Teeth* fetched a whopping \$24. While attending a paperback show in Los Angeles this last April, I noticed several of the *FHS* with price tags over \$10. But shop around, as I run across them fairly often in used bookstores for a buck or two (all, that is, except the Binder and Miles; for some weird reason, they're harder to find).

nations west of the Mississippi forced by Andrew Jackson to live on reservations, and then wastes no time scalping the prof.

The shaman distributes his "dragon's teeth" over the graves of the warriors, who rise to kill the white men who have defiled their tomb. In the shuffle, the shaman is blinded, and the Indians are left to fend for themselves (which is tantamount to letting loose The Keystone Kops). The Indians literally go wild, attacking high-wire towers, eating asphalt (!) and scalping anybody dumb enough to wander into the book.

Sole survivor of the party, Julie contacts her boyfriend Eric, a special agent with the FBI, who shows up pretty quickly with the cops. None of them, of course, believe her story. Meanwhile, the Indians are causing widespread panic. One hilarious scene takes place in a zoo, where the Indians kill buffalo and scalp a bicycling party. After they kill the cyclists, the braves manage to master the art of riding a bike! At this point, the Indians break off into two groups, vowing to meet again at the upcoming White Man Holocaust Shindig.

One band wanders into a group of hippies, and a discussion a la LAUGH-IN ensues:

"How," Running Deer said.
 "How?" a young man with long flowing hair and a ragged beard replied. "I'll tell you guys how. First, we kill all the politicians."

The Indians hitch up with the hippies (probably looking something like Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young) on the road until a violent miscommunication at a gas station.

Station attendant (after filling the hippies' tank): "That's six bucks."

Running Deer (putting a knife to the man's throat): "Why you say we six bucks? Me no like called a buck."

Convinced now that these "Indian warriors" are the real thing, the hippies manage to escape, leaving the braves stranded. But, unfortunately for the white man, one of the hippies has taught Running Deer how to drive

and the band sets off on four wheels to find their brother tribes.

Meanwhile, the second group of warriors hijacks a diesel carrying sulphuric acid. Mistaking the acid for "fire water," the Indians gulp the toxin down. In a delightfully sickening scene, uncharacteristic of most books in this series (but in keeping with the gorier tone of *Teeth*), the acid eats away the Indians' mouths, throats, and stomachs. But, since they are immortal, it does nothing more than piss them off something fierce.

Overhead flies a "great winged bird," and the roving band knows they've just got to have one of their own. So, of course, they sneak onto the Air Force base and scalp their way on board a fully loaded B-52. After the plane lifts off, they kill the entire crew and manage to activate an H-bomb, exploding the plane and taking a huge part of Alabama with them. Needless to say, there are now six less Indian nations represented.

The remaining Indians force their way to Manhattan, burning buildings, destroying dams and looting whole towns. When the braves hijack a tank and start throwing tourists off the Empire State Building, the Army finally takes Julie seriously. Luckily, Julie has made a miracle discovery: how to put the Indians back to sleep for good. Buffalo pelts sprinkled with fresh spring water need to be donned by the Indians.

Ignoring for a moment the fact that there is no fresh water in New York, Julie and Eric meet with the Indians in their camp in Central Park and trick them into wearing the pelts. In a bizarre and utterly ridiculous scene, Eric reveals that he has made a deal with the Indians and has essentially become one of them. He dons one of the pelts, wasting away to a skeleton before Julie's astonished (and confused) eyes. With the crisis at an end, a new one takes form. The military takes control of the government, and for all intents and purpose, the end of the world is nigh. For some unexplained reason, Julie lies down in a mound next to her beloved Eric, to be awakened some



day after the white man has destroyed himself. A confused and disappointing climax.

Many points in the dialogue droop to the "Heap Big Wampum" or "Me Lik'm Fire" clichéd Indian talk, but there's a lot of positives to be said for the book. In the hands of today's hack genre writers, the Indians probably would not have been unearthed until just before the climax of the novel. Instead we'd get "eerie atmosphere" or strange, unexplained killings. This book has an inherent craziness about it; an eccentricity. There are open scalplings by the thousands, and car wrecks galore from the get-go. Page 96 is the written equivalent of the infamous, overdone car wrecks of John Landis' *THE BLUES BROTHERS*. The elevated hijackings; bicycle, truck, plane, and tank. These are all written with a morbid, but undeniably funny, sense of humor. This is a book you should read, but check your brain at the door.

As for rating the books, I thought I'd stay in the spirit of this special issue and rate *The Frankenstein Horror Series* two different ways. The first in quality, the second in enjoyability.

Quality (in comparison to Toni Morrison, Norman Mailer & John Steinbeck)/Enjoyability (in comparison to Rick Hautala, Matt Costello & Joseph Citro):

The Frankenstein Wheel *** / ****
Night of the Wolf ★ / ★
Seven Tickets to Hell ★★ / ★★
The Marrow Eaters ★★ / ★★
The Hospital Horror ★ 1/2 / ★★
Dragon's Teeth *** / ****
The Beast With the Red Hands ★ / ★
Ghoul Lover ★★ / ★★
The Curse of Quintana Roo ★ / ★

B

Book Review

The Shapes of Midnight

by Joseph Payne Brennan

Berkley; 1980; 176 pgs.; \$2.25

Reviewed by Brian C. Mullen

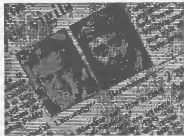
In his introduction to *The Shapes Of Midnight*, Stephen King notes that "Brennan writes in what E.B. White called 'the plain style,' a style which is as modest and as self-effacing as Joe Brennan himself...but for all of that, it is a sturdy style, capable of wielding enormous power when it is used well."

These stories range from light fantasy ("House of Memory," and the intriguing time-travel tale, "The House on Hazel Street") to psychological horror ("Disappearance", "Who Was He?"). Within these pages you'll also find a cold-blooded murderer ("The Impulse to Kill"), a couple of dandy demonic creatures ("The Willow Platform" and "The Horror at Chilton Castle"), as well as Brennan's most famous story, "Slime", which first appeared in the legendary *Weird Tales* back in 1953.

Brennan was not adverse to pouring on the gore, as evidenced by the opening story, "Diary of a Werewolf", a powerful study of a lycanthrope at odds with the residents of Juniper Hill. Even though he privately loathes the "village idiots", this tortured being feels remorse because many innocent animals are slaughtered by bloodthirsty hunters on his trail. The werewolf's attacks are well choreographed and the story builds to a jarring climax.

In "Canavan's Back Yard", an antiquarian is drawn to the bramble-infested yard which seems to stretch infinitely behind his book shop. "The Corpse of Charlie Ruli" is found for pound the best zombie story I've ever read. After drunken hobo Charlie Ruli drops dead of a heart attack while trudging through a cattail swamp, he gets a second chance at life...sort of. It seems that the swamp is deluged with electronic waste from a nearby laboratory. The toxic chemicals have a reverse effect on Charlie's metabolism and his newly energized corpse rises to terrorize suburban Newbridge. Because of its impact on me, I've placed it on my all-time list of great horror stories.

★ ★ ★ 1/2



What the Hell
ever happened
to...
Michael Avallone?

by
Bob Morrish

"The fastest typewriter in the east." That's the moniker that's often bestowed upon Michael Avallone, a man who's almost the walking definition of "prolific," with more than two hundred published books to his credit—although not all are to his name, since Avallone has employed more than his share of pseudonyms over the years. Although the majority of the author's work falls outside of the horror genre, he has written several—more than a dozen, by his estimate—books which fall into the horror category. *Scream Factory* readers are most likely to be familiar with *Tales Of The Frightened*, the *Satan Sleuth* series, or perhaps *The Beast With The Red Hands*, which is one of Avallone's pseudonymous efforts—in this case, the name "Sidney Stuart" is used. Most of Avallone's horror-related titles appeared in the '70s, and in this edition of *What The Hell Ever Happened To...*, we set out to track down Avallone, recap his horror career, and find out what he's been up to in the last decade or so.

Elsewhere in this issue, Peter Infantino discusses the aforementioned *Beast With The Red Hands* in the course of his overview of *The Frankenstein Horror Series*, a nine-volume series from Popular Library in the mid-70s. Avallone explains how he became involved with the series:

"My agent at the time, Jay Garron, came along and said that Popular Library's going to do this Frankenstein series. To make a long story short, Jay said they want you to do a title

and they're giving you the Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde theme. And that's how I came up with *The Beast With The Red Hands*. The only guideline I was given was that it should follow the Jekyll and Hyde theme.

Although there's a persistent rumor that Avallone edited the *Frankenstein Horror Series*, he says there's no truth to it:

"As far as I can tell, the editor of that line should have been James T. Bryans. Jim was the major editor at Popular Library during that period."

Avallone had earlier used the Stuart pen name for his adaptation of the film, *The Nightwalker*, which was scripted by Robert Bloch. In this particular instance, the author regrets his decision to utilize the pseudonym.

"That goes to show how stupid you can be. I did that in 1963, and I didn't want to ride on Robert Bloch's coattails, so I used the pen name. And to this day, I say 'what a stupid bastard I was. Look how much better it would be to have it say 'Michael Avallone writing the Robert Bloch screenplay.'"

Although the aforementioned book is a source of hindsight frustration to Avallone, the writer whose work he was adapting—Robert Bloch—is the subject of far different emotions.

"[Bloch is] my greatest friend. I get a letter every other week from him, for the last 20 or 30 years now. He is the nicest big name alive today. You cannot do better than Robert Bloch. In fact, I dedicated *The Coffin Things* to him. And what a checked history that book had. They had a second printing of it, they bragged

about Francois Truffaut going to do a film version of it—this was 1969, I think—but then funds got frozen in France and they never got back to it."

Returning to the subject of pen names, despite the cloak of anonymity provided by a pseudonym, Avallone says he never "took it easy" when writing behind another name.

"I always gave it my best shot, even when I was working under a pen name, because even with a pen name, the agent still knows who you are, and the publisher still knows who you are."

In fact Avallone goes so far as to say that "I think *The NightWalker* and *The Beast With The Red Hands* are two of the best things that I've ever done."

Although *NightWalker* was published in 1964 and *Beast* in 1972, Avallone's association with the horror genre actually goes back much further.

"Between 1948 and 1951, I wrote my head off doing horror and fantasy. Real genuine, *Weird Tales* kind of stuff. Anthony Boucher (editor of *F&SF* at that time) always said I came close but I wasn't quite good enough. *Weird Tales* told me that they had to use the same authors, issue in and issue out. It was a real tough market for a rookie to crack. They practically drove me out of the horror field because I wasn't selling any of (my horror stories). I had about...27 stories. So I stopped that kind of short story output, and I started writing detective fiction; and I kept writing it, because it sold like crazy.

"And all of those stories that *F&SF* wouldn't buy, I eventually sold them somewhere else. It's true that I used four of them in *Tales Of The Frightened*, but I eventually sold the rest of them somewhere else."

Speaking of *Tales Of The Frightened*: "I put that together in 1956 for Boris Karloff [to read for radio broadcast]. I wrote 26 five-minute shows which were going to go into syndication, which simply means that at the beginning of the show Boris would start off with "are you one of the frightened?" And then it would be "station NGC pre-

sents Boris Karloff's *Tales Of The Frightened* and then it would go into one of the tales. The company that I was working with tried to sell that series in conjunction with Chester Morris doing my Ed Noone story, 26 Riddles; Vincent Price doing gourmet stuff; Russ Hodges doing baseball stuff; Lee Bowman doing *American Aslan*, which was spy stuff; but they made the mistake of trying to package it all together as a "take it or leave it" deal. The Karloff and the Chester Morris everybody wanted, because they were horror and detective [themes]. So I did those in 1956, and Boris recorded 13 of them; the other 13 were in the sock. The program faded, then about 1963, when I was writing books for Belmont Publications, I mentioned it to Sam Post, and he went through the ceiling. "You have 26 Boris Karloff stories?" So anyway, Belmont was smart enough to package that book. I've got all five editions of the book, with the price going from 40¢ to 60¢ to 75¢ to 95¢ to \$1.25."

There was later a second volume of *Tales Of The Frightened*, but the stories in that volume were authored by Robert Lory, a situation which Avallone is reluctant to discuss: "I wasn't offered the second volume simply because Lyle Engle turned into one of the biggest thieves on this side of the United States. There's no use in even discussing that."

Avallone was also involved with yet another project entitled *Tales Of The Frightened*—in this case, a short-run (two issues) magazine which he anonymously edited in the mid-50s.

"I kept my name off of the masthead because I had two stories in each issue, and I figured at the time that it wouldn't look good to be listed as editor with my own stories in the issues. But it was stupid not to [take credit for editing the magazine] because it would have been a great feather in my cap to be known as editor, especially since the first collection is now regarded as being top notch.

"The magazine was originally supposed to be called *Boris Karloff's Tales Of The Frightened*. We packaged all the stories that wound up in the collection and sent them to



Boris, and he didn't like them. He thought half of the stories were not worth doing. And he said no to the magazine, even though he could have used the money at that point—but then he said yes to my collection."

The magazine version of *Tales Of The Frightened* went under after two issues when its distributor encountered financial problems.

In addition to the aforementioned Belmont collection *Tales of The Frightened*, Avallone also wrote another collection of horror tales, entitled *Where Monsters Walk*, which was published by Scholastic Books. "That was a nifty collection, but for reasons that I cannot understand until this day, that collection did not sell well. [The collection] was classified as a juvenile, but I didn't write down to my audience; I didn't write for ten-year-olds or twelve-year-olds. There are lots of adults who love that book.

"I did a sequel to that book called *Where Monsters Walk Again*, but that's still one of my unsold books."

Avallone's most recent effort in the horror genre was his novelization of *Friday the 13th, Part 3-D*: "That was a beautifully written book about one of the world's worst movies. I was doing some work for Leisure Books at the time, doing a number of novelizations, and that just happened to be one of them."

Avallone has also written several books which, although they were marketed as something other than horror, fall solidly into the horror genre. For starters, Avallone lists his Craghold series as "definitely horror"; there are four titles in the series—*The Craghold Legacy*, *The Craghold Curse*, *The Craghold Creatures*, and *The Craghold Crypt*—plus one unsold novel, called *The Craghold Cross*.

"[The Craghold books] technically could be called gothics, but they're really horror because they've got cemeteries in them and vampires and so on. It's straight horror, but with a wry twist.

"Some of my other gothic novels I would definitely categorize as horror. There's *Aquarius*, *My Evil*, *Warlock's Woman*, which I did under the Jean Anne Dupre name, *The Scarborough Warning*, which was by Edwina Noone, and *The Vampire Cameo*, by Dorothea Nile, which is a gothic that restores the Dracula

legend."

Avallone even edited a gothic collection which is borderline horror: "it was called *Edwina Noone's Gothic Sampler*. I went to all the gothic authors I knew and asked them for stories. A gothic short story is very hard to find, but we came up with some, including one by Phyllis Whitney that was in *Weird Tales* about 20 years before that."

Avallone lists several more of his titles as falling into the horror genre:

"*The Coffin Things*, absolutely, and...I would definitely call *Shock Corridor* a horror novel, because what happens to the central character is horrible. He loses his mind because he went into a nut house to impersonate a maniac and he becomes one himself.

"*The Killing Star*, which sold [to a publisher] only in England, is an amazing serial killer novel, but I would call it a horror book because the killer does things to the six victims that the Nazis did to Jews, and leaves the Star of David on the door.

"There were also a couple of others...*Mitzi* was about a woman who sliced penises off—it sounds cheap when I say that, but there was more to it than just that. And *The Nights Before Chaos* was about a maniac who blew up X-rated book shops."

Although it's been a few years since Avallone has published a horror title, he still follows the genre closely, and has some strong opinions about the field. In particular, Avallone decries the popularity of some recent titles, feeling that they have benefited from well-funded packaging and promotional campaigns, whereas earlier books of equal quality were unjustly ignored.

"I'm not trying to take anything away from *Silence Of The Lambs*, because I loved it. But when somebody says to me why don't you write something like *The Silence Of The Lambs*, I say 'I already did it—it was called *The Beast With The Red Hands*.' But nobody's read it, because of poor packaging, poor distribution—and the Sidney Stuart pen name didn't help, either. The Avallone name on the books would have sold a few more copies."

In the course of expressing his displeasure with the inequities of the publishing world, and with some of the authors who have

achieved somewhat 'unjust' success, Avallone singles out the horror genre's champion best-seller—Stephen King.

"One of the things that bothers me about Stephen King [is that] every book that he's written is a lift of a classic theme. I could give you the progenitor for every one of them. For example, *Carrie* owes a great debt to Jerome Bixby's "The Good Life," and for *Christine* you can look at *My Mother, The Car* or the TV movie *Duel* with Dennis Weaver. Now, it's true King took these things and elaborated on them. But I'm not a Stephen King fan and he knows it.

"I'd like to read you a letter that I wrote about him once. This was printed in *Mystery Scene* about five years ago: '...who was that grubby little kid, back there in the late '60s, clutching copies of *Tales Of The Frightened*, *The Coffin Things*, *The Vampire Cameo*, *The Felony Squad*, *Shock Corridor*, and yes, *The Thousand Coffins Affair*? Why, even in the '70s, wasn't he boning up on the Craghold Hotel series, the *Satan Sleuths*, and *The Beast With The Red Hands*, and digesting all his Bloch, Lovecraft, Shirley Jackson, Bradbury, Bixby, Beaumont, Sturgeon for future recycling? When does everybody wake up and admit that this writer hasn't written a single thing that was new?"

As should be obvious, Avallone believes that King has benefited greatly from being in the right place at the right time, and from his re-packaging old themes. Avallone even feels there was a crossroads in his career where, with a little different approach, he could have been the one to achieve widespread popularity, instead of King.

"In 1974, I did this crackerjack series for Warner Paperbacks called the *Satan Sleuth* series—*Fallen Angel*, *The Werewolf Walks Tonight*, *Devil*, *Devil* and two unpublished books, one called *Vampires Wild* and the other *The Zombie Depot*. Warner convinced me that they couldn't sell more than a certain amount of copies of these, and I was upset that

they didn't score bigger, because the covers were great, the packaging was great, everything.

"You can see by the dates: *Devil*, *Devil* came out in '75, which is exactly a year before King's *Salem's Lot*. Now here's the difference: In the *Satan Sleuth* series, I made the classic mistake of 'giving the lie' to all my horror material. In other words, there are actually no vampires, there are no werewolves, there are no zombies—there are people doing a number on other people. Now I say to myself, why didn't the books do better than they did? And the main reason that I can come up with is that the horrors in them are real, and not made up, not supernatural."

The author also points to film adaptations as being crucial to the kind of mass appeal which King has achieved: "If any one of my 215 books had been made into a movie, it would be the difference between night and day—I would've become a household name."

Avallone, who recently turned 68, is now basically retired, but is still attempting to sell a few books. "I've got 25 unsold manuscripts downstairs, covering all the genres."

So perhaps Avallone's incredible total of 215 books published will grow even higher. And the reputation of "the fastest typewriter in the East" will live on.





Not *An Overview of* So

Alien Creatures on Television

Alien

BY KEVIN LINDEMUTH



Hear the word "alien" and you'll likely envision a creature—big eyes, large head, small body—staring out the door of his saucer, primarily because that's the most recent media concept of an alien. Although associated with science fiction (hey, they're from outer space), aliens are used by the majority of television movies and series as a horrific element, with producers and writers somehow believing that the extra-terrestrials' sheer "alienness" will make them scary. Unfortunately, this no longer works, due to the fact that such ideas have been recycled to the point that they're simply old hat.

Aliens are no longer scary. Not only are they taken for granted as *peaceful* visitors (e.g., *CLOSE ENCOUNTERS, ET, WAVELENGTH*, etc.) by viewers, but ninety percent of the time, the creatures portrayed on the tube are not so alien after all. They're usually one of the following:

- 1) the standard alien, described above and now so common as to appear almost normal
- 2) a variation on some earth animal
- 3) basically human in appearance

The alien is the ultimate television stereotype, responsible for some of the most disappointing movies and series in the past thirty years of television. But don't just take my word for it...take a peek at the following (chronological) overview.

Alfred Hitchcock Presents (CBS, 1955-1964; NBC 1964-65; NBC, 1985-87; USA Network, 1987-88). This classic anthology show probably has more than one story regarding aliens, but the only one I recall appeared as part of both the original run and the new series: an alien in human form wants to prevent his kind from invading Earth, but the woman reporter he confides in turns out to be an alien as well. She, of course, kills him.

Twilight Zone (CBS, 1959-65; 1986-88) The old Zone has all three varieties of aliens, from the pig-like "Eye of the Beholder" creatures to those indistinguishable from humans. Many episodes revolved around humans being the true "aliens," or around characters who we think are humans who turn out to be aliens. Surprise! This set a trend...

The Outer Limits (ABC, 1963-65). This series is an exception, in that the representations of the aliens are generally better than the stories themselves, from the ant-like "Zanti Misfits" to the bat-like humanoids in "Nightmare." They are usually animal variations, human-looking, or somewhat amorphous beings.

Voyage To The Bottom Of The Sea (1964-68). *Voyage* features aliens that are disguised as humans and those that look like sea creatures—or rather, men in rubber suits.

Lost In Space (CBS, 1965-68). Primarily has aliens that are indistinguishable from humans; although, like *Voyage*, this series has plenty of men in suits. For some reason, a giant chicken alien comes to mind...

Star Trek (1966-69). The aliens here are mostly human with animal traits, from insect-inspired Andorians to the pig-like Tellarites and the dinosaur-like Gorn. *Star Trek* is mostly a people-oriented show, so aliens remained somewhat familiar. In the Gene Roddenberry universe, the purpose of the alien is to emphasize humanity. The most frightening beings were the big-headed shape shifters from "The Menagerie."

The Invaders (ABC, 1967-68). First show to exploit the idea of aliens living among us,—later used in *V. There's Something Out There*, *The Aliens Are Coming*, *Starman*, *Hard Times On Planet Earth*, to name a few. Roy Thinnes (of the recent incarnation of *Dark Shadows*) sees a flying saucer land and soon learns an invasion is on its way. It's not easy for him to convince people of this, as the aliens look human. The only way to tell them apart from the real thing is a too-long finger, or when they start glowing from need of "regeneration."

Land Of The Giants (ABC, 1968-1970). A spaceship of humans crash-lands on a planet of human-looking aliens; however, the "aliens" (actually the "natives" in this context) are ten times the size of the humans. The size discrepancy is the basis of the show. There's nothing more terrifying than a giant squirrel, let me tell you...

UFO (Syndicated, 1970). In 1980, SHADO—Supreme Headquarters, Alien Defense Organization—protects mankind from the alien invaders with green faces.

THE LOVE WAR (TV Movie, 1970). Lloyd Bridges and Angie Dickinson are warring aliens who've assumed human form and are battling on Earth. The only way to detect the aliens is through sunglasses (an idea later used in Carpenter's *THEY LIVE*). Most of the movie

deals with them unwittingly falling in love with each other, but she kills him anyway. The last shot of the movie shows Dickinson walking away, as seen through the sunglasses. She looks vaguely like a mummy.

NIGHT SLAVES (TV movie, 1970). A small town community is under the hypnotic spell of human-looking aliens trying to repair their crashed ship. James Franciscus (*BENEATH THE PLANET OF THE APES*), immune to their powers because of a convenient metal plate in his head, falls in love with one of the female aliens.

THE PEOPLE (TV movie, 1972). This Coppola-produced film is kind of an anti-CHILDREN OF THE DAMNED. Kim Darby (*DON'T BE AFRAID OF THE DARK; TEEN WOLF TOO*) is a schoolteacher in yet another small town, inhabited by aliens who had crash-landed on earth. Her stuents start displaying powers such as telekenesis. Daresay, she thinks it's rather odd.

THE STRANGER (TV movie, 1973). In what seems like an extended *Twilight Zone* episode, an astronaut played by Glenn Corbett (*PLANET OF THE APES*) wakes up in a 1984-like society that—gasps!—turns out to be another world. We know this because of the twin moon in the closing shot.

The Starlost (ABC?, 1973). Kier Dullea (2000; 2010) is trapped on a huge space station hurtling through outer space. In two episodes, he encounters a really annoying alien played by *Star Trek's* Walter Koenig. Typical and boring.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF FLIGHT 412 (TV movie, 1974). Two jets chase a UFO and there ensues a military investigation that doesn't uncover anything. Nothing is resolved. Could there really be aliens?

KILLDOZER (TV movie, 1974). This one's a predecessor of Stephen King's *MAXIMUM OVERDRIVE*. A force from another world attacks a construction crew on a Pacific Isle by inhabiting—can you believe it—a bulldozer.

Construction equipment does not make for a very terrifying alien.

THE STRANGER WITHIN (TV movie, 1974). Barbara Eden's actions are controlled by her unborn baby (a theme later used in the Corman-produced **UNBORN**) that may be...an alien!

Space 1999 (Syndicated, 1974-76). Moonbase Alpha, on a moon hurtling through space, encounters much more interesting aliens than both incarnations of *Star Trek* combined. Alien metamorph Maya can transform into any creature, though for some reason it's usually Earth animals. Other interesting aliens included the killer foam, the intelligent trees, and the giant squids (which were comparable to the creatures from **THE GREEN SLIME**). This was one of the few alien-oriented shows that was surprisingly unsettling, because it was always so dark and depressing. The aliens in this universe wanted to kill you, not invite you to colonize them.

The Six Million Dollar Man (ABC, 1974-78). Colonel Steve Majors encounters human-looking aliens at the San Andreas Fault who have also created a bionic bigfoot (played by Ted Cassidy of *The Addams Family*); another human-like alien who simply wants to leave the planet, and a group of aliens stranded on a deserted island who have Jekyll and Hyde characteristics.

THE UFO INCIDENT (TV movie, 1975). This is the story of Betty and Barney Hill (Played by Estelle Parsons and James Earl Jones), who are abducted by golden aliens with big heads. This movie is only distinguishable because it was one of the first "true" alien stories. Many similar movies—and visitors—were to follow.

DISTANT EARLY WARNING (TV movie, 1975). In an out-of-the-way Arctic research station, aliens hypnotize humans and make them see deceased family members. Aliens are human-

looking...well, dead human-looking.

THE SEARCH FOR THE GODS (TV movie, 1975). Kurt Russell wanders around New Mexico hoping to find some clue to the ancient astronauts. He doesn't find a hell of a lot. I'd like to find a clue why this was made...

The Bionic Woman (ABC, 1976-77; NBC, 1977-78). Lindsay Wagner plays the Six Million Dollar Man's female counterpart, encountering similar human-looking aliens. She even comes across the Allen Bigfoot, this time played by Andre the Giant.



Fantastic Journey (NBC, 1977). A boat-load of assorted characters are stranded in the Bermuda Triangle, where they encounter strange societies. One episode has human-appearing aliens trying to escape the triangle as well.

Wonder Woman (ABC, 1976-77, CBS, 1977-79). Among the creatures that Lynda Carter encountered on her wondrous adventures were a few aliens. One particular episode, clearly "inspired" by the recent version of **INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS** (1978), has aliens taking over human bodies in yet another small town. There were only two good reasons to watch this series, and neither of them were aliens.

The Man From Atlantis (NBC, 1977-78). In one of the underwater adventures, Patrick Duffy and Belinda Montgomery encounter aliens that have duplicated humans in order to repair their crashed spaceship. When one of the aliens is captured, it's discovered that they copied *everything* from the humans—the apparent diving suits they wear are actually their skins.

THE MAN WITH THE POWER (TV movie, 1977). A man finds out that his father was actually an alien and that he has inherited alien psychokinetic powers.

The Martian Chronicles (TV mini-series, 1977).

The aliens in this Ray Bradbury adaptation have large bald heads, small ears, and are able to assume the shape of humans (as in *DISTANT EARLY WARNING*). They are all but destroyed by chicken pox (as in *War Of The Worlds*).

Battlestar Galactica (ABC, 1978-80). This space adventure series and *STAR WARS* clone had robotic aliens in the "Cylons" alien bar scenes (as in the *STAR WARS* Cantina sequence), and insect aliens in the "Ovions." Most of the inhabitants of the worlds they visited were human looking, though.

Quark (NBC, 1978-79). Another *STAR WARS*-inspired show, this one a comedy. Richard Benjamin is the captain of a garbage-collecting ship, with Tim Thomerson (*TRANCERS*) as transmute Gene/Jean and a science officer named Ficus that was a human looking plant. The only thing frightening about this show was that it was broadcast.

Project U.F.O. (NBC, 1978-79). This show based its stories on our government's real life Project Bluebook, which investigated actual UFO sightings. The two monotone government types would question people (primarily from small towns), scope out the sighting area (suspiciously in the shape of a saucer), and come up with a reenactment. The aliens here look like those from *THE UFO INCIDENT* or *CLOSE ENCOUNTERS*. Nothing was ever resolved.

Buck Rogers in the 25th Century (NBC, 1979-81). During the first season, Earth's primary enemies were the human-looking Draconians and other human-appearing aliens. In second though, Buck went to explore other worlds (as in *Star Trek* and *Battlestar Galactica*) and encountered some really stupid looking aliens. Among these were: Hawk, from a birdlike race, who had feathers instead of hair; a race that aged backwards (that must really hurt, coming out); Mark Lenard as a head that lived on a host body, and a diminutive blue alien whose face was left over from *PLANET OF THE APES* (it was the same makeup!).

Cliffhangers (NBC, 1979). This hour-long show consisted of three ongoing separate storylines, one being *The Secret Empire*. Here, a cowboy in the old west discovers an underground alien city, where he encounters the human-looking aliens who inhabit it, giant spiders, and a green tasmanian creature that previously appeared in a Lovecraft adaptation on *Night Gallery*. It looked like a midget in a suit the first time, and it looked like a midget in a suit here. Nothing new.

THE MYSTERIOUS TWO (TV movie, 1979). John Forsythe plays the leader of a desert cult, who may or may not be an alien. He stays human-looking the entire movie and not a darn thing is resolved. This was a pilot for a potentially boring series.

THE ALIEN FACTOR (movie, 1979). This extremely low-budget endeavor wasn't made for TV but it's about the only place you'll see it—and probably on USA Network at three in the morning. Another alien ship carrying three different creatures crash lands in a small town (seemingly one of the few small towns remaining which hasn't already had aliens crash land in their midst). This is interesting only if you're into *Land Of The Lost*-type animation.

Nothing animated can be scary.

THE ALIENS ARE COMING (TV movie, 1980). Reptilian aliens similar to the Daleks from *Dr. Who* possess humans, whose eyes light up and glow green, a tell-tale sign of inhabitation if I ever saw one. This film was trying to be the *Invaders*, but why?

THE INTRUDER WITHIN (TV movie, 1981). A prehistoric alien is uncovered by Chad Everett on an oil rig. Half *ALIEN* and half *THE THING* adds up to a whole lot of predictability. The creature, perhaps a man in a rubber suit, coincidentally looks like a creature in a similarly-titled Corman movie called *THE TERROR WITHIN* (1989), which is yet another *Alien*-inspired movie. Funny how that works out.

The Greatest American Hero (ABC, 1981-83).



Ralph Hinkley, played by William Katt, is given super powers by aliens so that he can protect the Earth. The first encounter with the aliens is typical, with a car stalling out, and a huge saucer and lights appearing. The benevolent alien, not seen until the second season, looks like a cross between a monkey and a sea horse.

The Powers Of Matthew Star (NBC, 1982-83). A prince from the planet Quadros is sent to earth to develop his telepathic and telekinetic powers so that he can one day defeat the invaders that have taken over his planet. Since he looks human, it's easy for him to blend into the local high school population, as it is for his guardian, who poses as the school's science teacher. Every so often, an alien—usually in human form—tries to kill him. The first season is typical fish-out-of-water stuff, while in the second season young Matthew uses his powers to help the government (as is later done by *Superboy*).

The Phoenix (ABC, 1982-83). Judson Scott (*STAR TREK II*) plays Sennu, an extra-terrestrial that walks out of a Mayan tomb that's been uncovered by archeologists. He has typical alien powers—telekinesis and telepathy—and is subsequently pursued by the government because of this. *The Phoenix* is another variation on *The Fugitive* (as recycled in *The Incredible Hulk* and the *Starman* series).

V (1984-5). This was two mini-series and then a series. The "visitors" are human-looking, but this is a disguise for their true lizard-like appearance. To illustrate their alienness, they're shown doing things like capturing and freezing humans, and ingesting live rodents.

And, in the first two mini-series (but not in the series) they talked in reverberating voices (a la *GARGOYLES*). The series revolved around the alien invasion and the humans' efforts to stop it. One of the more interesting subplots involved a half human/half alien female named Elizabeth, who possessed more of those amazing alien powers we keep hearing about. She looked like a human, by the way, not a lizard.

Tales From The Darkside (Syndicated, 1984-88). This half-hour anthology was on for four years and must have had at least one story involving aliens. My inability to recall those episodes is an indication of just how memorable they were.

Otherworld (NBC, 1985). Hal and June Sterling, along with their three kids, are transported to another world while visiting the Great Pyramid of Cheops. The planet they become trapped on is Earth-like, as are its inhabitants, but the world is divided into many different (and stereotypical) societies. Among these are a town inhabited by androids, and a society that lives for war (with an appearance by Mark Lenard, last seen as an alien on *Buck Rogers*). Each week, the Robinsons—excuse me, the Sterlings—have to blend into these scenarios in a world where they are the aliens (shades of *Twilight Zone* again).

STARCROSSED (TV movie, 1985). Belinda Bauer (*PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY*, *SERVANTS OF TWILIGHT*) is an alien stranded on Earth, chased by yet another secret government organization. In between the running around, she falls in love with a human.

Amazing Stories (1985-87). As with *Tales From The Darkside*, I can't think of very many memorable alien episodes. The one that does come to mind was a comedy involving Milton Berle and three or four small aliens looking for directions on how to get back to their planet.

Starman (ABC, 1986-87). Based on the John Carpenter movie (1984), this version features Robert Hayes in the Jeff Bridges role, as an alien who assumes the body of a dead human.

He reunites with his fourteen-year old son and goes in search of his lost love, all the while pursued by a—you guessed it—government agent. *Starman*'s son, as

with most human/alien crossbreeds, is able to do amazing things, such as levitate objects.

Star Trek: The Next Generation (Syndicated, 1987-present). The assorted aliens here are generally more human looking than those of

STAR TREK

the original show. What differences there are between human and alien are primarily pointed ears and assorted lumps on faces. An exception is when the occasional energy being makes an appearance. The best aliens to date—tall, angular creatures with no faces, and mouths on their foreheads—surfaced on the cliffhanger final episode of last season, in which the crew is transported to 19th-century San Francisco.

Out Of This World (Syndicated, 1987-1991). Although Evie is the daughter of Troy, an alien from the planet Antareus, she has different powers than most alien hybrids. She can freeze time and will objects into existence. Too bad those powers can't generate laughs—which are important for a situation comedy. And this is a situation comedy. Isn't it?

Monsters (Syndicated, 1988-90). Much better in story and production values than *Tales From The Darkside*, *Monsters* had quite a variety of aliens. In "Pillow Talk," the alien resembled a bed. Its human servant would lead unwitting women up to it, its huge mouth would open, and the unsuspecting victim would fall in. One potential victim leads the bed-creature's human servant to her refrigerator—which is really another alien and which eats him! In "Glim-Glim," an octopus-like alien tries to communicate with humans to find a cure to the disease that his kind had mistakenly brought to Earth. He encases a contaminated town in a protective force field to prevent the entire planet from becoming infected and dying. However, two humans, thinking the creature is here to invade and conquer, kill it—and the force field, thus dooming mankind. It's a role reversal in which man, not the alien, is the monster (where have we come across this idea before?).

SOMETHING IS OUT THERE (TV movie, 1988). Another alien ship, this one taken over by an alien monster, crash lands on Earth. The only survivor, besides the monster, is the beautiful Ta'ra, who must try to stop the creature because she's, like, this alien policeman. The monster hides in the bodies of its victims (like *The Aliens Are Coming*, *War Of The Worlds*,

etc.), which makes it extremely difficult to spot. Thanks to Ta'ra and a jaded human cop, the creature is eventually destroyed.

Something Is Out There (NBC, 1988). Stranded on Earth, Ta'ra and her police partner put the kibosh on criminals and the occasional alien. Sometimes Ta'ra's psychic abilities come in handy.

Superboy (Syndicated, 1988-91). This series chronicles Superman's younger years, before he moved to Metropolis. Superboy is first shown at college, and later when he worked for a government agency which investigated weird phenomena. Sometimes he comes across aliens that have the same super powers as himself.

Hard Time On Planet Earth (CBS, 1989). Martine Kove is a galactic warrior banished to Earth, in human form, for being so violent. He can only return to his planet when he learns compassion. His adventures are monitored by a roving eye called *Control*. Primarily played for humor, the stories revolve around the alien and various human customs. Sometimes he encounters other aliens in human form. Kind of a light-hearted version of *The Incredible Hulk*. Kind of like something I've seen before...

Alien Nation (Fox, 1989-91). Based on the motion picture of the same name, aliens here look strikingly like those from *The Martian Chronicles*—bald, bulbous heads with small ears. Both the film and the series are set in the future, after a giant slave ship has crash landed on Earth, bringing with it thousands of aliens, who have subsequently adapted to their new environment. The series, a variation on the cop buddy show, revolved around one of the aliens and his human police partner. For once, the aliens aren't here to invade—they're just here to adapt and live. Although the aliens have no psychic abilities, they are smarter than humans, slightly stronger, and have rather unusual mating procedures, involving three individuals. Much of the drama and humor revolved around the differences in human and alien customs.



War Of The Worlds (Syndicated, 1989-90). Based on the 1953 George Pal theatrical version, this series features both three-eyed, three-finger aliens (as in the original film) and aliens possessing humans, who turn to sludge when their bodies are used up (similarly seen in the 1958 classic *I MARRIED A MONSTER FROM OUTER SPACE*). These aliens clearly want to take over the Earth. Later in the series, it's established that, because of human pollution in the last half of the century (more likely because of a lack of budget) the aliens have to stay in human form. In the second season, on a devastated Earth, the aliens are never seen in their original form. This was a bad version of *V*.

They Came From Outer Space (Syndicated, 1990). Twin brothers from the planet Crouton, on their way to college at Oxford, crash land (as aliens are wont to do) in California and decide to stay. One of their abilities is to feel each other's pain. I wish they could have felt mine, from watching this.

The Wolf Of London (Syndicated, 1990). In this show, Randi—who becomes a werewolf during the full moon—and her professor investigate supernatural phenomena (vaguely like *The Night Stalker*). In one episode, they come across aliens that inhabit people's bodies, hopping from one to the other. If it wasn't for the hosts acting strange, no one would know that they are really inhabited by...aliens.

It (ABC mini-series, 1991). Based on the Stephen King novel, the alien here assumes the shape of assorted monsters, such as a zombie and a werewolf, taking on the form of children's fears. It is most terrifying when it is in the guises of a clown, portrayed by Tim Curry. When the alien's true shape is shown, it disappointingly resembles a giant spider and is about as easily dispatched. *It* bugged me.

NOT OF THIS WORLD (TV movie, 1991). Lisa Hartman and A. Martinez provide soap opera antics in yet another small town invaded by an alien—an alien that looks like a giant stick! The creature, which feeds on electricity, subsequently heads for the local power plant, although how it achieves movement is a mystery. This alien makes Tabanga from the film

FROM HELL IT CAME look like Speedy Gonzalez. How can it move?—It's a giant stick!

Nightmare Cafe (NBC, 1991). As with any Wes Craven production, this one is extremely uneven; it involves the ghostly inhabitants of a late night cafe—which materializes in various locales—encountering and helping people in trouble. In the series first episode (which was actually directed by Craven) some aliens, in the guise of midgets, seek to avoid abuse from a bunch of stereotypical small town rednecks while they complete repairs on their crashed ship. At the end, one of the midgets takes off its human mask to reveal...a giant chicadee (just like *Lost in Space*). Wes should stay away from comedy. Better yet, how about staying away from TV altogether?

INTRUDERS (TV movie, 1992). Very similar to the decent theatrical release *COMMUNION* (1990), this four-hour movie is a subtle version of *MARS NEEDS WOMEN* or *FRANKENSTEIN VS. THE SPACE MONSTER*, though not nearly as thought-provoking. A psychiatrist (Richard Crenna) has several patients who tell him about their abduction, examination, and sometimes impregnation, by aliens. The creatures here are the typical Pillsbury Dough Boy, big-headed things that perform the typical alien antics. We even get to see a half-breed in one of the many, many flashback sequences. Also on hand is a secret government agency whose job it is to cover up UFO investigations. Yawn, yawn, yawn.

Aliens are the key figures in some of the most disappointing movies and series on television. Given their stereotypical situation—as invaders, castaways, or visitors—their motives and actions are now clearly predictable. TV aliens have become such a common sight that perhaps they should now be called "familiars," rather than "aliens." Furthermore, they don't come "in peace" any more, they simply come to bore us.

R

Merritt



at the Movies

by Sheila Merritt

Bad horror films are so numerous that they could easily fill a book. There are the low budget productions, whose cheap sets, laughable special effects, and strained acting serve only to enhance an adolescent audience's ability to ignore the movie and get on with some basic teen-age discovery about their dates. Then, of course, there are the poorly-dubbed overseas imports. These films always seem to have a problem with sound: The dialogue is not loud enough (this may be intentional; what can't be heard, can't be laughed at), but the rock music and violent sequences are quite audible. A list of John Carradine's work from the '60s until his death, surely would qualify as some of the worst horror movies of all time. For the sake of manageable discussion—that is, being able to say more than "that was a ludicrously bad movie"—10 films have been selected as the topics of this issue's column. The field got narrowed by selecting films that should have been better than they turned out. These are movies that have respectable budgets, boast well-known performers in their casts, and even some revered directors and screenplay writers. Some have attained a cult following, some even have many moments that exhibit their unfulfilled potential. All of them misfired in some way, which leads them to an inadvertent ability to make an audience prone to titters rather than screams.

The first high expectation/major letdown of 1992 comes in the form of yet another Stephen King story. *SLEEPWALKERS* is promoted as the first King tale written by the master directly for the screen. This should be great, right? No more problems with adaptation from page to screen—just straight from King to his hoards of loyal fans. A nice concept in theory, but

lousy in practice: This story about feline shapeshifters is short on explanation, characterization, and suspense. Directed by Mick Garris, and starring Alice Krige, Brian Krause, and Madchen Amick, *SLEEPWALKERS* can barely keep itself from nodding off into boredom induced oblivion. The overly cute use of Santo and Johnny's instrumental of "Sleepwalk" is initially amusing, but used too often. The incestuous relationship between mother Krige and son Krause is definitely for PG audiences, although Krige tries admirably to imbue her part with some dimension even in some of the most embarrassing scenes and absurd dialogue. Poor Amick is the "lifeforce" Krause and Krige require to survive. Surely King could have come up with a better plot device than having a virgin be the only suitable means for supernatural longevity. When Krause attacks her in a graveyard, the scene is more frightening from a date rape point of view, rather than from a catlike monster trying to suck the life out of his potential victim. Cameos and walk-ons by horror favorites Clive Barker, John Landis, Joe Dante, Tobe Hooper and King himself are brief fun "in-jokes," that cannot salvage a movie with so little in its favor. The multitude of cats who surround the house of the shapeshifters (their adversarial relationship is never explained) is perhaps symbolic of audience reaction to this film: Let's attack as a mob, and maybe this thing will end.

As poor a film as *SLEEPWALKERS* is, it cannot compete in the disappointment sweepstakes when compared to the ultimate abomination: *EXORCIST II: THE HERETIC*. This 1977 follow-up to the critical and box office success of *THE EXORCIST* boasts a fine cast: Richard Burton, Max Von Sydow, James Earl Jones,



Oscar winner Louise Fletcher, and the necessary return of Linda Blair. The excellent cinematography is the work of veteran William A. Fraker. Despite these credentials, however, the film suffers from one of the more unmanageable, preposterous scripts (credited to one "William Goodhart") and directed with a misguided sense of mythic relevance by John Boorman.

Boorman, who botched the science fiction movie ZARDOZ into cult status, was also responsible for the Arthurian fantasy EXCALIBUR. These movies, like EXORCIST II suffer from excesses that the director seems to have neither the ability or desire to control. In trying to give EXORCIST II a mythic quality, he deviates from the theme of the demon Pazuzu as being related to the devil—if not the devil, himself. Here Pazuzu is an evil spirit of the air, connected with the destructive locusts which are plaguing the thoughts of James Earl Jones. Jones, the audience discovers in flashback, is the adult who as a child was exorcised by Von Sydow in his pre-Linda Blair period. Jones, a scientist with a specialization on locusts, must aid Blair and Burton (a priest investigating the deaths from the earlier film) in their allegorical good versus evil struggle. That Jones must dress up in locust attire to work his magic is almost as silly as repossessed Blair trying to seduce an understandably nervous looking Burton. Blair is so funny, all tarted up in Frederick's of Hollywood style lingerie, that Burton's expression of anxiety is absolutely priceless! This film is an excellent example of what happens when writers and directors take themselves too seriously and try to strive for art and mythic qualities that only they can see.

It is not inconsistent to have art and artistry in horror films; the problems arise when the artiness overwhelms the rest of the

production. In 1980's THE SHINING, for example, director Stanley Kubrick is less concerned with making a frightening movie, than with making a visually attractive one. The extraordinary Stephen King novel could have been one of the very best horror films had Kubrick and co-screenwriter Diane Johnson not so altered the story. Like his movie BARRY LYNDON, in which style triumphs over the substance of the plot, Kubrick's vision of THE SHINING has minimal characterization; only the melodramatic antics of Jack Nicholson are emphasized.

Nicholson's high speed overacting can be contrasted to the generally slow and strange pacing of the movie itself. In a bizarre deviation from the book, potentially heroic Scatman Crothers is trying to reach the imperiled Shelley Duvall and Danny Lloyd, but when he finally reaches the hotel, he is dispatched by the crazed Nicholson in short order. Why all this build up? Ask Stanley Kubrick. Another interesting change from the book involves the removal of the animated topiary in exchange for a hedge maze. One of the reasons given for this change is technical: It

would have been financially prohibitive to make the mobile topiary animals seem realistic. More than one movie viewer has asked the question: "Whatever happened to good, old-fashioned editing?" in which the animals could appear to have changed position. This subtlety could have been very frightening, but apparently generating fear is not what Kubrick's concept is all about. Certainly he possesses the capacity for creating fear as in the excellent Viet Nam abuse-of-power epic FULL METAL JACKET. Maybe he could not see THE SHINING as having enough substance to merit that kind of emotional power, or maybe he just didn't care. The result is the same: A major horror film from a major studio becomes a major disappointment.

Merritt's Measure of Mediocrity

(AKA "they coulda been contenders")

SLEEPWALKERS
EXORCIST II: THE HERETIC
THE SHINING
GHOST STORY
BURNT OFFERINGS
THE AWAKENING
INCUBUS
THE AMITYVILLE HORROR
THE EVIL
THE LEGACY

It is not uncommon for bestselling or critically acclaimed novels to be less than compelling in their translation to the big screen. The film *GHOST STORY* is a prime example of a complex novel that becomes trivialized as a movie. Because of its intricate story and depth of character, the novel probably would have fared better as a multi-part drama on PBS. Unfortunately, the 1981 film is a trite, unfrustrating adaptation that leaves the audience unfulfilled.

It is not a prerequisite to have read the novel to be unhappy with *GHOST STORY*. The screenplay, by Lawrence Cohen (who did such a fine job adapting *CARRIE*) is equal parts ridiculous and pandering. It panders to the easy score: The cheap shot for shock value. Director John Irvin reinforces this attitude with close-ups of the villainess in make-up suitable for Halloween (or a TV movie.) The villainess is wonderfully acted by Alice Krige (she seems to be making a habit of doing fine work in poor films.) She certainly shows that she can hold her own with the veteran actors who round out the cast: Fred Astaire, Melvin Douglas, John Houseman, Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., and Patricia Neal. A cast roster like this should have guaranteed some quality to the production, and, indeed, these performers lend a touch of class to a lackluster movie that abuses their talents. It is a shame to see audiences sniggering at the actors, not because of their acting, but because of the absurdity of their actions in response to the plot. They deserve better than that, and so do discerning horror audiences.

Another film adapted from a good novel, that turned into a laughable movie, is *BURNT OFFERINGS*. Based on the novel by Robert Marasco, this production threw subtlety out the window. The novel's strength is its overwhelming sense of dread within a superbly delineated atmosphere. The 1976 movie, directed by TV veteran Dan Curtis, is heavy-handed and laden with stock horror clichés. The screenplay, co-written by Curtis and William F. Nolan, allows the cast to become stereotypes instead of characters with depth. This cast boasts two Academy Award winners: Bette Davis and Eileen Heckart, two Oscar nominees: Karen Black and Burgess Meredith—and Oliver Reed. Needless to say, all these previous

awards and nominations have no importance with regard to *BURNT OFFERINGS*. Conversely, the embarrassment of watching Meredith as a leering, limp-wristed brother of the equally embarrassingly overacting Heckart, only serves to make these actors appear shallow. These are not seasoned performers who can overcome the material; they are carried away with it. Davis fares quite a bit better, but then again, she had already suffered the tortures of *WHATEVER HAPPENED TO BABY JANE?* and walked away with another Oscar nomination for it. Black, whose character undergoes a transformation that kills her sex drive (among other things), has some of the worst dialogue: She assures frustrated spouse Reed that "I still find you incredibly sexy." Actions speak louder than words on that score (or lack of score), and Karen's descent into dementia is perhaps an early indicator of why her career has deteriorated so profoundly since *FIVE EASY PIECES* brought her recognition. *BURNT OFFERINGS*, like *GHOST STORY*, is an example of a complicated novel that could not be duplicated with any justice to the screen. That does not, however, excuse the films from insulting an audience's intelligence by not trying to make the movies worthwhile in their own right. Surely, novelists Peter Straub and Robert Marasco understand that their work stands on its own, and aficionados of the books must accept this, as well. Yet, it is not inconsistent to hope for a movie to respect the novel on which it is based, no matter what changes are deemed necessary to make it "cinematic." *BURNT OFFERINGS* overstates every nuance that the novel whispered. The quiet terror and menace is reduced to a sideshow mentality.

In 1980, an adaptation of Bram Stoker's novel, *THE JEWEL OF SEVEN STARS*, was made into a film entitled *THE AWAKENING*. What a beautifully filmed production! Lots of wonderful scenes of Egypt, shot by esteemed cinematographer Jack Cardiff. Glossy sets! Exotic locale! Charlton Heston!! What a colossal bore! Not much exciting happens in this horror movie that seems to want to deny that it's a horror movie. When Egyptologist Heston discovers the tomb of evil queen Kara, his wife (Jill Townshend) simultaneously gives premature birth to a stillborn child. Said child mirac-

ulously returns to life, and 18 years later (in the form of Stephanie Zimbalist) manifests attributes of Kara. There are 7 murders which are executed in such a sterile, uninvolved manner that they are about as gripping as the many scenes of digging for archaeological remains. The lengthy exposition and slow pacing are relieved by the one nice shock sequence: Zimbalist, possessed by Kara, kisses Daddy Heston in a most undaughterly fashion. That, unfortunately, is as exciting as the movie gets. It's hard to comprehend that of the 3 screenwriters for this film: Allan Scott, Chris Bryant, and Clive Exton, Scott and Exton had previously collaborated on the riveting DON'T LOOK NOW. That movie is every bit as thrilling as "The Awakening" is a yawn.

A film that is every bit as ponderous as THE AWAKENING is INCUBUS. INCUBUS is a classic case of a novel (by Ray Russell)

that was doomed before its film interpretation. The touchy subject matter: Women who are raped and die from the extraordinary results of the assault is not an easy topic. As a novel, this material could be dealt with through verbal descriptions that, while extremely disturbing, aren't horribly graphic. The medium of film demands a certain obvious visual nod to literal violence. It is impossible, therefore, to deal with such a topic and not be either hedging the issue or being ultra-violent in its treatment. INCUBUS leans toward hedging, although there are some scenes, including one of a girl getting dispatched on a toilet seat, that are not in the best of taste. The predictable dialogue, which features the inevitable: "I've never seen anything like it before," is an example of a screenwriter (George Franklin) who is definitely uncomfortable with the subject, and relies on stock material to cover this discomfort. While the town doctor (John Cassavetes) talks at great length about "Dry intercourse" and huge amounts of red sperm and ruptured uteruses, he never calls in a specialist from a big city for consultation. The town, named Galen, is isolated in the extreme—the only means of explanation for the events is an antique book that

reveals the tale of the Incubus. For those who don't have this tome at their disposal, the Incubus is creature who literally comes to women for the purpose of sexual intercourse. The fact that his endowment is lethal means little to him; he is driven only by desire. The movie's confusing ending intends to shock by showing that the incubus is a gender bender; that is, the sex of the offender changes once in incubus form. This promotes only laughter at a movie that is as dry as the Incubus's intercourse. Director John Hough, who faced similar problems of graphic sex and violence in THE

LEGEND OF HELL HOUSE, is clearly overwhelmed about how to treat this material.

John Cassavetes, who as a director achieved great critical success, and, as an actor acquits himself admirably in such genre films as ROSEMARY'S BABY and THE FURY displays only an irritating tediousness here.

INCUBUS is a sad reminder of the limitations of film; what the mind can visualize is usually far more exciting than a director's interpretation, especially when the boundaries of good taste are taken into consideration. Something is usually lost in translation; be it an "in your face" assault that can work in a book, but is obnoxious visually. Or, as in the case of INCUBUS, a fence straddling approach that ends up being simultaneously boring and offensive.

While not in the least offensive, THE AMITYVILLE HORROR rivals INCUBUS in the realm of boredom. This 1979 film is ploddingly directed by Stuart Rosenberg. The screenplay by Sandor Stern is based on the allegedly "true" events documented in the book by Jay Anson. The events, as shown on the movie screen, are silly and totally unscary: The toilets that keep backing up disgusting material, the masses of flies, the inability to have an uninterrupted telephone discussion with a priest (Rod Steiger), all make for tedious and ridiculous viewing. Stars Margot Kidder and James Brolin try to project the necessary fear that comes with the knowledge of having purchased a diabolical domicile (or, haunted house.) Poor Priest Steiger, possessed by overacting, eventu-



ally goes blind for no apparent reason. He is considerably more fortunate than those audience members who keep their eyes open to watch this slow-paced movie trudge its way to a conclusion. Anson's book, while sensational in the extreme, does have the ability to grip even the most skeptical reader. While the reader may still not embrace a belief in the supernatural, at least s/he can enjoy a fast-moving, entertaining work. No such enjoyment can be derived from the movie.

Another haunted house film that did not deliver its potential is *THE EVIL*. Released in 1978, this tale of a house being renovated as a drug rehabilitation center, has promise. Joanna Pettet and Richard Crenna are the social worker types who are fixing up the place. They discover that the previous owner imprisoned the devil in a vat in the basement. Crenna unwittingly releases the devil, and, of course, all hell breaks loose. The premise of do-gooders and struggling druggies battling the very essence of evil is intriguing: The devil could have a field day playing with the already tortured psyches of the substance abusers, while the motives of Crenna and Pettet could be explored. Instead, director Gus Trionis and screenwriter Donald G. Thompson have opted for mayhem. A scene in which a skeptic, portrayed by Andrew Prine, chops off his hand with an electric saw, does not play upon the psychological tension. Prine meets his end in a bog, no doubt weighed down by the thickness of the plot devices. There is one nice scene where a female character is dragged off by a demon with cloven feet. Here, an element of restraint and style is operative, since the feet, and little else, of the demon are shown. Later, this is negated, however, when the director chooses to show the devil in the flesh—as the overweight and jovial Victor Buono. Buono does not make a convincing or menacing prince of darkness—but he does make a rather laughable one. *THE EVIL* never generates much evil. The possibilities are evident, but unfulfilled.

Unfulfilled possibilities riddle the movie *THE LEGACY*. This 1980 production is directed by Richard Marquand, who previously directed *THE EYE OF THE NEEDLE*, and subsequently directed *THE RETURN OF THE JEDI*. The stars of

THE LEGACY are the extremely attractive Katharine Ross and Sam Elliott, and they have in support Roger Daltrey from The Who. The plot, which is equal parts *AND THEN THERE WERE NONE* (isolated people who get killed one by one) and *THE OMEN*, was scripted by Paul Wheeler and Patrick Tilley. Their script was based on an original story by Hammer horror film veteran, Jimmy Sangster. 20th Century Fox very much wanted another *OMEN*-like success, and banked on this movie to deliver. It has all the trappings of *THE OMEN*: Characters despatched in horrific ways (Daltrey meets his end through a tracheotomy performed with a steak knife), nice scenery and cinematography. Unlike *THE OMEN*, however, this film has no build-up of suspense. Each grisly death is executed in a perfunctory manner. Ross, as the talented L.A. interior decorator commissioned to work in England, does not summon the shadings of character that the role dictates. Upon finding that she is one of the six heirs to a diabolical legacy, she acts with screaming bewilderment. Later, in the movie's "surprise" conclusion, her behavior is antithetical to all her previous actions and reactions. Elliott, as her architect boyfriend, also responds to the action in ways not in keeping with earlier established character traits. Like the inane pop song which punctuates this film's beginning and end, the lyrics "another side of me" (sung by Kiki Dee) establish the lightness and triviality of the material. This movie tries to copy the qualities of *THE OMEN*, but by relying on formula rather than style or originality, it fails in its attempt.

These ten horror films are examples of potentially stimulating works that fail to satisfy the audience. While most are available (or soon to be available) on video, it is more worthwhile, for the connoisseurs of the genre, to view lower budget, less ambitious movies. *CARNIVAL OF SOULS* and *THE EVIL DEAD* are only two examples of enjoyable and artistic movies that lack major studio support, and still rise above their humble financing.

The equation for the worst of the larger budget movies appears to be: Big bucks yield big yucks—of laughter. An ironic comment on intentions gone awry, at the expense of the studio, and the audience.

B



OR
*How to Justify Sitting Through A Turkey
And Still Claim That You're Not Wasting Your Life*

You've just rented a horror movie from your local video store. You come home, shove in the tape, and settle back for an evening of fun frights.

If, twenty minutes into the movie, you:

A) start itching for a smoke,

B) find yourself remembering particularly traumatic events from your childhood,

C) suddenly wonder how long it's been since you last clipped your toenails, or

D) begin digging into the sofa in hopes of finding loose change;

then chances are you're watching a bad horror movie.

Since the recurrent theme of this issue is "The Worst of the Worst," I will assume that all of you have, at some point in your lives, found yourself watching a lousy horror film. Many are tricked into this, but an ever-increasing majority actually seek out bad movies.

You gotta wonder.

Time for a digression:

Since 1980 I've been reviewing horror movies for Crispin Burnham's *Eldritch Tales*. During these twelve years I've seen my share of turkeys. For a while, I even came close to joining the ranks of those who can sit around a table in a dim, smoke-filled room and talk intensely about the artistic merits of, say, *SHRIEK OF THE MUTILATED*. But then I started to consider something.

Every time I watch a bad horror movie, that's at least ninety minutes of my life that I'm never going to get back. Not being one who is looking forward to my eventual initiation into Worm Food Delta Stinka Cappa, I began to question the basic intelligence of this (forget about anything remotely resembling aesthetic satisfaction).

So, here I am, having promised the gang at *The Scream Factory* a column on my picks for the worst horror movies ever made.

Ah, hmm, well...

I decided to veer off the road a little. Instead of listing my picks for the worst of all time, I've decided to offer you something which will be (I hope) not as easy to dismiss. Lists of bad movies that don't deserve anyone's attention are as common as dirt but not as useful. So what you're going to get from me is a baker's dozen of "bad" horror movies which, though they may very well be atrociously acted, written, or directed, have something which recommends their being viewed; it may be a fantastic look or a terrific performance or fierce editing, but, for as bad as the film may be, this particular something doesn't deserve to be brushed aside just because it's stuck in a clunker.

Let's get to it.



1) **THE KEEP:** The second half stinks. Big time. It's muddled, pretentious, cluttered, frenzied, and downright laughable. But there is that first half: beautifully realized and executed with style and craftsmanship, the first forty minutes of this movie actually manage to convince you that F. Paul Wilson's novel is being given the kind of treatment it deserves. Unfortunately, it's a little like watching your favorite pitcher go through a dazzling warm-up and wind-up, then trip over his own feet, drop the ball, and fall face-first into a wad of old chewing tobacco. However, there are two things which justify your viewing time: the look (it's one of the most visually sumptuous horror movies ever made), and Jurgen Prochnow's intensely brooding and hypnotic performance.

2) **THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM:** We're talking Stuart Gordon's remake. If there ever was a film whose shifts in tone were more half-assed, I've yet to see it. Gordon seems to have no idea what the hell to do with this one; the humor is forced and out of place, and his attempts at genuine atmosphere and terror come off as desperate. Like **THE KEEP**, this has two things to recommend it: the physical production is damn near flawless, and Lance Henriksen is superb as Torquemada. (And, if you rent the video, there's an added plus: a fifteen minute mini-documentary on the making of the film. You'll be treated to an interview with the witty Henriksen, as well as plenty of amusing hot air from director Gordon.)

3) **CARNIVAL OF SOULS:** Some would argue that this film doesn't belong here, and—if that judgment is based on the second half of the movie—they might be right. However, the first half is a celluloid *Somnifex* tablet; disjointed, terminally slow, and the acting would have to improve to qualify as bad high school drama. But the second half of this film ranks, in my opinion, with David Lynch's **ERASERHEAD** in its non-stop assault of mesmerizing, horrifying imagery. Forget that you can spot the "twist" coming five minutes into the first reel; the last forty minutes of **CARNIVAL** is like watching a

collaboration between Bosch and Fellini.

4) **THE GUARDIAN:** William Friedkin remains one of this country's most powerful directors, and this film shows that he has lost none of his technical expertise. But the script (which Friedkin shares the blame for) is one of the most illogical and silly I've encountered in quite some time, and must hold a record for undeveloped characterization. The two leads register a big zero, but Jenny Seagrove is absolutely terrific in an almost unplayable role. The editing (especially in the eerie prologue and two heart-stopping chase sequences) is the best and fiercest you'll ever see. A special nod has to go to cinematographer John A. Alonzo,

who gives the movie a beautifully mythic look.

5) **PRINCE OF DARKNESS:** John Carpenter decided to try his luck in Philip K. Dick/David Cronenberg territory, and for about an hour looks as if he might pull it off, but somewhere along the line he either decided he was going in the wrong direction or realized he didn't know what the hell he was doing in the first place. He starts throwing in a lot of horror movie clichés all too obviously designed to give horror movie audiences (who he must think to be idiots) what they expect. The result is one of the most intriguing failures of the last decade. It is, in turns, thought-provoking, frustrating, terrifying, fascinating, obvious, relentless, sexist, and boring. The first fifty minutes are great, then it degenerates into a godawful mess that almost (but not quite) redeems itself with a chilling final shot.

6) **MONSTER IN THE CLOSET:** Shot on a budget of about \$168.50, this low-budget satire actually succeeds in producing more intentional laughs than unintentional. Crammed with cameos by B-movie veterans, most of the fun in this movie is trying to spot how many films it simultaneously pays homage to and thumbs its nose at. You can probably find this one in the \$4.99 bin at your local video store. (I've even seen it at K-Mart.)



7) **LEATHERFACE: THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE 3:** Everybody hated this...except, I think, for me. Even its writer, David J. Schow, would like to see this one diced and sliced into oblivion. A lot of you probably already know the behind-the-scenes bullshit that caused this film

to be re-edited severely before its initial release. I had no idea what to expect of it and, to my surprise, I liked it. A lot of Schow's dark humor remains, but what impressed me about TCM3 was its soundtrack—and I don't mean the music. Chopped up so its violence wouldn't be as severe, director Jeff Burr gives you a film where you don't so much see the violence as hear it—and it's almost worse because of that. A minor point which recommends its viewing, I know, but I won't back down, even though this unnerving effect is probably an accident.

8) **FIRESTARTER:** I am not, for the record, a big admirer of the films which have been made from Stephen King's books, and this one in particular disappoints because the book is one of King's most cinematic—so how could they screw it up? Watching this one is like attending a symphony concert where the orchestra somehow gets ahead of the conductor and never manages to get things on track. But Martin Sheen and a miscast (but effective) George C. Scott are a lot of fun to watch—plus there's a pretty good Tangerine Dream score, to boot.

9) **NOTHING BUT TROUBLE:** The first of two Dan Ackroyd films I'm going to mention here, this was the first which Ackroyd both wrote and directed, as well as appeared in. A truly demented over-the-top black comedy that was eviscerated by the critics and ignored by the public, NBT features some of the strangest characters, weirdest set pieces, and almost

offensively violent humor that any horror fan could ask for. Downright grotesque in places, this film will surprise you by not flinching at its seedier (and sometimes repellent) aspects. The cast is top-notch (for once Chevy Chase and especially John Candy display some of the creative comic spark they're reputed to have),

and the editing is lean and right on the money: Ackroyd doesn't show you anything that doesn't advance the story. Don't be put off by the bad word of mouth; rent this one, crack open a twelve-pack, make some popcorn, and laugh your ass off. (Pay particular attention to the traffic fines paid by the second carload of offenders brought before Judge Ackroyd's bench.)

Braunbeck's Brigade of the Braindead

- 1) THE KEEP
- 2) THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM
- 3) CARNIVAL OF SOULS
- 4) THE GUARDIAN
- 5) PRINCE OF DARKNESS
- 6) MONSTER IN THE CLOSET
- 7) LEATHERFACE: TEXAS CHAINSAW III
- 8) FIRESTARTER
- 9) NOTHING BUT TROUBLE
- 10) NEIGHBORS
- 11) THE ISLAND
- 12) NIGHTWING
- 13) I SPIT ON YOUR GRAVE

10) **NEIGHBORS:** Based on Thomas Berger's novel (at least ninety percent of the dialogue is lifted directly from the book), this was another film with Dan Ackroyd that bit the big one with both critics and audiences. Terminally weird, to be sure, but also charmingly twisted. The coal-black humor is not offered in a sledgehammer fashion but rather with a smirk and a wink. Both Ackroyd and John Belushi (in his last film) are tremendous. Their coffee drinking scene is a masterpiece of subtle, grotesque humor.

11) **THE ISLAND:** Absolute trash, but fun trash. Michael Caine and his son are taken prisoner by a band of inbred pirates whose haven is an uncharted island somewhere in the Bermuda Triangle. Violence and gore aplenty, very little intelligence, but Caine and David Warner have a helluva good time and, if you're in the right frame of mind (like, say, you've just been dumped by your girlfriend or just discovered you've got crabs), you'll have a bloody good yo-ho-ho of a time, too.

12) **NIGHTWING:** Based on Martin Cruz Smith's

semi-bestseller, this film, above all the others listed here, had the most potential. Had any director other than the plodding Arthur Hiller been handed this material, it could have been brilliant. As it stands, it's a not-that-bad tale of a colony of vampire bats (who may or may not have been summoned by an ancient curse) that terrorizes an Indian reservation. The supernatural elements are downplayed in favor of a more realistic approach to the material. The special effects are laughably terrible. But, once again, David Warner comes to the rescue with another sly performance. (Watch how he deftly handles the ponderous speech he's given upon his entrance—this material would have defeated Olivier in his prime.)

Now we come to the last film, one that will probably add to my list of enemies, but here goes:

13) I SPIT ON YOUR GRAVE (aka DAY OF THE WOMAN): First off: This offensive, sexist, masochistic piece of slime is undoubtedly one of the most pornographic and voyeuristic excursions into human depravity it's ever been my misfortune to suffer through. Why did I see it? The truth: morbid curiosity. Why am I putting it on this list? Two reasons: 1) It contains one of the most horrifying images ever to appear in films—it shows up shortly after the bathtub scene, and takes place on the inside steps, and, 2) the physical performance of Camille Keaton (grand niece of Buster). Though her line delivery sometimes leaves a lot to be desired, she seems to possess a modicum of Buster's brilliant ability at physicalization. At points in this movie I felt as if I were watching a documentary about the after-effects of rape. After the relentless brutalization of this woman (which takes up the entire first half of the movie) is over, there is a scene where she drags herself up the stairs and crawls into the shower, then kneels underneath the spray, shuddering. Take my word for it, you will believe that you're spying on a woman who has just been gang-raped. Keaton gives a shattering performance which deserved a better fate than a piece of shit film like this. Her performance, and the image I spoke of, deserve

serious attention. It's just a pity they had to appear in something as sick as this movie.

One last piece of business. If someone were to say, "Quick—name a good science fiction movie!," odds are most people will say something like STAR WARS, CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND, or BLADE RUNNER.

What about CHARLY? Or ICEMAN? Those two (among the greatest SF films ever made, in my opinion) rarely pop up in your garden-variety discussion of SF. Why? Well, neither one is techno-heavy, for starters. They have few, if any, special effects, and both downplay the science in favor of the rich human drama. Yet if you were to remove the scientific element from either, the story would collapse.

The same can be applied to horror movies.

Yes, you can find the "rich human drama" in such films as THE LEGEND OF HELL HOUSE and THE EXORCIST, but these films are up front about being horror movies and always come up in serious discussions (as well they should).

But when most people think of horror movies, they don't think of films such as Sidney Lumet's THE OFFENSE, John Frankenheimer's SECONDS, or Sam Peckinpah's BRING ME THE HEAD OF ALFREDO GARCIA, let alone something like Oliver Stone's TALK RADIO...yet all of these are horror movies; it's just that they weren't presented to the public as horror films (for fear of losing a wider audience), or their makers, for whatever bizarre reason, didn't think they were making a horror movie.

Starting next issue, Yours Truly will be doing a column entitled THE PARALAX ROOM wherein I'll discuss such films as those I just mentioned and tell you why I think the horror community should give them a serious look. A few other examples of this type of movie are: SEANCE ON A WET AFTERNOON, THE LOST WEEKEND, SORCERER, and MAN-HUNTER.

Come back next time, I think you'll find it to be not boring at all. Until then...

Ⓢ



THE LATE SHOW



by Lawrence McCallum

Maybe I'm just an old softy, but I think it's very difficult to find a film that doesn't have anything to recommend it. Even an Ed Wood Jr. turkey like **PLAN NINE FROM OUTER SPACE** (1958) has a great six-second sequence in which Tor Johnson rises from the grave better than anyone else in horror film history. However, since this is a 'worst of' issue of TSF, I have to get into the spirit of things. Here goes with the biggest collection of turkeys that I've yet compiled. Hope they bring back some memories!

DR. TERROR'S GALLERY OF HORRORS aka RETURN FROM THE PAST (84m; American General; 1967). Wretched, inappropriately titled, omnibus-style chiller tries to capitalize on the success of **DR. TERROR'S HOUSE OF HORRORS** (1965), a far better Amicus effort that used the same anthology format. John Carradine acts as the film's host, introducing five short horror stories and starring in one segment entitled "The Witch's Clock." This segment might have been worth seeing had the supporting cast been adequate and the visual effects at least passable. The other clichéd horror yarns are a waste of time with such talents as Lon Chaney, Jr. and Rochelle Hudson look-

ing terribly embarrassed because of the inane dialogue they're forced to recite. Also, if you think the Gothic mansion clip from **HOUSE OF USHER** (1960) got a real workout in the other Roger Corman Poe flicks, wait until you see this amalgam of stock shots. At least a third of the film consists of footage from such Corman efforts as **HOUSE OF USHER**, **THE RAVEN** (1963), and **THE HAUNTED PALACE** (1963). Directed by David Hewitt.

THE WIZARD OF MARS (81m; American General; 1965). Awful SF-horror about an expedition to the red planet that encounters the usual assortment of

Martian monsters, natural obstacles, and remnants of a super-scientific culture. John Carradine is given star billing and things perk up considerably when he's on screen—which is only for about five minutes. Roger Centry and the supporting cast of unknowns are poor, but the script and direction are even worse. More cinematic trash from director David Hewitt.



THE BRAIN THAT WOULDN'T DIE (81m; AIP; 1963). Strange but quite bad imitation of West Germany's **THE HEAD** (1959) has a brilliant surgeon saving the decapitated head of his sweetie and searching for a new body to accommodate her disembodied noggin. Generally third-rate except for one or two pleasurable gruesome moments. Jason Evers, Jr. stars under his real first name, 'Herb.' Virginia Leith co-stars in a film directed by Joseph Green.

THE HORROR OF PARTY BEACH (82m; Fox; 1964). See! Ghoulish atomic beasts who live on human blood, stated the ads for this silly '50s shock schlock with beach party trivia, teenage

romance, and motorcycle melodrama. The results manage to evoke two or three laughs amidst a goldmine of inanities and cine-mistakes. Black and white photography is better than expected, though. John Scott and Alice Lyon star in a film directed by Oel Tenny.

MISSILE TO THE MOON (78m; Astor, 1959). For some reason, Astor decided to do a remake of **CAT WOMEN OF THE MOON** (1952), an infamous quickie that at least had a great performance by Victor Jory to help make things more bearable. The old lost-civilization-of-women theme gets another work-out as five astronauts find a colony of Amazons, as well as rock monsters and giant spiders, on the surface of the moon. The girls look fine, though they can't act, and Tommy Cook gives an energetic performance as an escaped convict turned space explorer. The rest of the film is routine low-budget space opera stuff, directed with a heavy hand by Richard Cunha. Richard Travis, K.T. Stevens, and Gary Clarke co-star.

MONSTER FROM THE OCEAN FLOOR (64m; ARC; 1954). Roger Corman's first production lacks the humor, fast pace, and effective shocks usually associated with his films. Shot over a long weekend at a cost of \$12,000, the film deals with the discovery of a cyclopean sea creature that is responsible for a series of disappearances. Vapid, slow and ineptly made thriller is directed by Wyatt Ordung (of **ROBOT MONSTER** infamy). Ordung co-stars with Stuart Wade and Anne Kimball.

THE CAPE CANAVERAL MONSTERS (71m; Astor, 1960). Alien life forces possess the bodies of two dead rocket scientists and embark on an evil campaign to sabotage the U.S. space program. Scott Peters, as a brilliant graduate student, comes off well, but the rest of the cast is amateurish with equally poor writing and direction. One light-hearted scene provides a few laughs though, as the eccentric German scientist/Uncle of Peters' girlfriend scolds him for his 'lecherous' ways, exclaiming "I do nutt vunt yoo mekking goo-goo eyes ett mine neesel" Linda Connell and Katherine Victor co-star with direction by Phil Tucker.

ROBOT MONSTER (63m; Astor, 1953). The most notorious entry in the 3-D craze of the early to mid-50s concerns the last few survivors of a global holocaust who must hide from an alien assassin named Ro-Man. There's little in the way of entertainment value in this flick due to its silly action, foolish dialogue and completely ridiculous monster—a gorilla who wears a deep sea diver's helmet! One of the film's saving graces is a bizarre musical score composed by the great Elmer Bernstein. George Nader and Claudia Barrett co-star in a film directed by Phil Tucker and written by Wyatt Ordung.

INVASION OF THE STAR CREATURES (81m; AIP; 1962). Corman stock player Jonathon Haze wrote this low-grade horror parody about a pair of alien Amazons and their monstrous henchmen whose nefarious plans for world conquest are foiled by a pair of bumbling army privates. The script contains some funny lines and several good concepts but incredible budget restrictions and trowel-like direction by Bruno VeSota obscure the few amusing satirical points. Lead roles are played by Bob Ball and Frankie Ray, whose comedic skills are about as subtle as a sledgehammer.

FRANKENSTEIN MEETS THE SPACE MONSTER (78m; Futurama; 1965). Poor grade-Z thriller about alien invaders who occupy a seaside location, looking for bikini-clad girls to be used as breeding stock. Familiar theme was handled more effectively in **MARRIED A MONSTER FROM OUTER SPACE** (1958) and even in Toho's second-rate **THE MYSTERIANS** (1959). Robert Reilly isn't bad as a robot-astronaut who eventually saves mankind, but the rest of the performances range from indifferent to shockingly inept. Crummy special effects, but a fair rock score helps to alleviate some of the boredom. James Karen and Nancy Marshall co-star in a film directed by Robert Gaffney.

BRIEF OF THE MONSTER (69m; OCA; 1956). This probably isn't Ed Wood at his worst, but it comes close enough. The story of a mad scientist and his attempts to create a race of atomic supermen contains a few moments of atmospheric photography and several campy laughs. Funniest scene is the knock-down, drag-out



brawl between the immensely obese Tor Johnson and emaciated Bela Lugosi (who looks as though he's about to keel over any minute). Tony McCaoy and Loretta King co-star.

THE MIGHTY GORGA (B4m; American General; 1967). Adventurers search for a rampaging giant ape in this pitiful SF-horror effort directed by—who else—David Hewett. Although the story takes place in the jungles of an isolated African plateau, Hewett supposedly shot the film amidst a thick cluster of trees located behind a supermarket. Some fans claim that you can see a brief glimpse of the parking lot in one scene! Good performance by Scott Brady, who deserved much better. Anthony Eisley co-stars.

BLOOD AND LACE (B7m; AIP; 1971). Awful grade-Z horror-suspense film that marked a sad return to the movie screen for Gloria Grahame. A psychotic woman (Grahame) torments kids at an orphanage while a disfigured killer prowls the area, looking for victims. Highlights include two bloody attacks with a meat cleaver and the discovery of a severed hand in a young girl's suitcase. Good supporting performances by Milton Selzer and Melody Patterson, who manage to stay apart from the whole mess. Directed by Philip Gilbert.

BEAST OF BLOOD (90m; Hemisphere; 1971). Horrendous climax to the "Blood Island" trilogy, in which Dr. Foster (John Ashley) finally defeats the crazed Dr. Lorca and his murderous mutant, Ramon. The final shootout is exciting enough, if you can stay awake that long. Even when willowy Celeste Yarnell starts showing a lot of skin, the film still doesn't generate much interest. Read a book instead.

FIRE MAIDENS FROM OUTER SPACE (B0m; Topaz; 1955). When astronauts journey to the 13th moon of Jupiter, they discover a castle inhabited by a weird old man and 16 shapely girls dressed in tunics. Oh yeah, there's a monster too. There's not enough monster though, and far too much ritual dancing to the accompaniment of 'Stranger in Paradise.' Anthony Dexter is adequate as the male lead but this was quite a come-down from playing Rudolph

Valentino a few years earlier. Susan Shaw and Paul Carpenter co-star and Cy Roth directs.

THE BEAST OF YUCCA FLATS (60m; Crown; 1961). Exposure to atomic radiation turns a scientist (Tor Johnson) into a disfigured, murderous brute. Trite, obvious and third-rate, but it's always nice to see Tor Johnson fill up a movie screen when there's nothing else of value to look at. Directed by Coleman Francis.

HILLBILLIES IN A HAUNTED HOUSE (88m; American General; 1967). Dumb spook spoof tries to do a country western reworking of the rock 'n' shock formula perfected by AIP. A busty blonde (Jol Lansing) and a pair of good ol' boys find themselves stranded in a 'haunted' house, which is actually a hide-out for a spy ring. Inept and childish, but partially redeemed by the presence of Basil Rathbone, Lon Chaney, Jr. and John Carradine. Directed by Jean Yarbrough.

KING DINOSAUR (65m; Lippert; 1954). Four astronauts discover an uncharted planet inhabited by stock shots lifted from ONE MILLION B.C. (1940). Cheesy new special effects are no help in the crude first feature from the talented Bert I. Gordon, who characterized this SF-horror as being only one notch above the home movies he made while in his early teens. Gordon manages to provide a precious few moments of excitement and tension but the climax is so abrupt that one might suspect that Gordon suddenly ran out of film. So-so acting by Bill Bryant and Wanda Curtis.

THE EYE CREATURES (B0m; AIP; 1965). John Ashley took time off from his beach party flick commitments to star in this slipshod remake of Edward L. Cahn's fairly amusing INVASION OF THE SAUCERMEN (1957). Teens manage to rout alien invaders, despite obstacles created by bull-headed townies and incompetent military leaders. First and worst of AIP's tailored-for-TV movies. Cynthia Hull co-stars in a film directed by Larry Buchanan.

IT'S ALIVE (B0m; AIP; 1968). A poor Larry Buchanan thriller that might have been watchable had the producers spent some money on

It. A geologist (Tommy Kirk) and three other people are held prisoner by a maniac who feeds people to his cave-dwelling pet dinosaur. Script was originally written for Peter Lorre who was scheduled to star in both a 1964 version and a subsequent AIP-TV series. Lorre's death, early in 1964, marked the end of the project until this TV feature utilized the four-year old script in 1968. Though basically a waste of film, this shot-in-Texas cheapie boasts a good performance by local favorite Ann MacAdams, who also starred in AIP's cheapie CREATURE OF DESTRUCTION (1968, a remake of SHE CREATURE), as well as the infamous Texas-produced COMMDN LAW WIFE (1960).

ZONTAR, THE THING FRDM VENUS (68m; AIP; 1966). Energetic performance by John Agar distinguishes otherwise shoddy remake of Roger Corman's IT CONQUERED THE WORLD (1956). A renegade scientist (Anthony Houston) paves the way for an invasion of Earth by bat-like Venusians. Directed by Larry Buchanan. (ed. note: there was also another lousy flick in this series, YEAR 2889 (1965) directed by Buchanan, which was a rip-off of Corman's THE DAY THE WORLD ENDED (1955), itself pretty lousy!)

DRACULA VS. FRANKENSTEIN (90m; Independent International; 1971). Panning a movie with Forrest J. Ackerman is like kicking a cocker spaniel, but this flick is so bad that there's no avoiding it. Actually, FJA is one of the few good things about the film. He brings a lot of energy and good-natured ham to his portrayal of Dr. Beaumont, who falls victim to the Frankenstein monster on a deserted country road. Count Dracula also turns up along with Dr. Frankenstein (played well by J. Carroll Naish). The muddled mish-mash of a script combines horror, rock music, hippie happenings, and biker melodrama, all of it directed in an uncertain fashion by Al Adamson. Along for the laughs are Lon Chaney, Jr., Regina Carroll, and Jim Davis.

VAMPIRE MEN OF THE LOST PLANET (85m; Ind. Intl.; 1971). Double-billed with DRACULA VS. FRANKENSTEIN was this second Al Adamson bomb concerning a plague of vampirism that is

traced to a strange new planet populated by the title creatures. Director Adamson does one of Jerry Warren's numbers with this cheapie and constructs a new film out of foreign inserts. The original footage, taken from a Filipino horror/fantasy, presents us with a few interesting FX sequences as we see fanged bat-men clashing with fierce warriors on a desolate landscape. Too bad Independent International didn't release a dubbed version of the Filipino flick instead of merging it into an abortion like this. Poorly shot U.S. sequences star John Carradine, Robert Dix and Vicki Volante.

QUEEN OF OUTER SPACE (80m; United Artists; 1958). The great Ben Hecht wrote the script for this SF-horror flick, originally intending it as a spoof. Unfortunately, director Edward Bernds took the story much too seriously and turned it into a mediocre space opera endowed with cheap sets, unconvincing special effects, and countless stock shots taken from other films. Silly tale about a team of space soldiers thwarting a Venusian plot to destroy Earth has a couple of laughs and one or two fair shocks, but is too poorly made to be regarded as either an effective spoof or a tolerable space adventure. Then again, who can be serious about any film that stars Zsa Zsa Gabor? Co-starring are Eric Fleming, Paul Birch, and Dave Willock.

THE MAD MONSTER (77m; PRC; 1942). Demented scientist George Zucco injects wolf's blood into the arm of a simple-minded oaf (Glenn Strange), turning him into a werewolf. Poverty row shocker, below par even for PRC, lacks the atmosphere and ambience of many 1940s 8-movies. Zucco is better than the material, but the supporting cast is no help. Co-stars An Nagel and Johnny Downs are badly directed by Sam Newfield.

VDDDDD MAN (62m; Monogram; 1944). Foolish supernatural jumble with Bela Lugosi's eerie portrayal of the title character emerging as the film's only redeeming feature. The rest is arrant nonsense about zombies and mad scientists with John Carradine wandering in a trance-like state, while George Zucco hops around like a drunken chicken as he performs some hilarious voodoo rituals. Shameful pic

must have been quite an embarrassment for William Beaudine, who directed Mary Pickford in *LITTLE ANNIE RRDNEY* (1925) and *SPAR-RDWS* (1926).

THE BEACH GIRLS MEET THE MONSTER (70m; U.S. Films; 1965). After a six year screen absence, John Hall directed and starred in this teen-slanted horror flick about surfers being gruesomely murdered, apparently by a strange sea creature. Hall gives a good performance as an oceanographer who is unable to fulfill the sexual needs of his much younger wife, but the film is slow, unpolished, and lacks even good surfing footage. AIP released this absurd effort to TV as *MONSTER FROM THE SURF*.

BLOOD FEAST (75m; Box Office Spect.; 1965). A maniac (Tom Wood) attempts to revive the Egyptian love goddess by synthesizing the organs of beautiful women in this gruesome, inept shocker directed by Herschell Gordon Lewis. First of the Lewis gore movies has value only as a vile curio.

2000 MANIACS (75m; Box Office Spect; 1965). Poorly made blood and guts shocker about the ghostly inhabitants of a southern town, massacred by Union troops during the Civil War, who take revenge by torturing northern tourists. Crude and sometimes offensive in its strongly anti-southern sentiments, but the film still manages to generate a few moments of derisive laughter. Tom Wood and Connie Mason star in a Herschell Gordon Lewis film.

CURSE OF THE SWAMP CREATURE (80m; AIP; 1966). Horrid remake of Alex Gordon's *VOODOO WDMAN* (1957) concerns a treasure hunt that becomes a merry-go-round of madness as a mad scientist turns an evil woman into a hideous swamp-dwelling monster. The sadly neglected Francine York turns in a good performance as the film's terrified heroine, but John Agar walks woodenly through his leading man role, acting as though he was just visiting the set. Poorly photographed, to boot. Directed by Larry Buchanan.

Rating For All: ♂ (bomb)

B

Book Review

Alien Sex, edited by Ellen Datlow
Dutton hc, May, 1990; \$18.95

Reviewed by Bob Morrish

Datlow, co-editor of St. Martins' annual *Year's Best Fantasy* anthology, has assembled 19 stories, ten of which appear for the first time here, dealing with the rather titillating theme implied by the title.

Leigh Kennedy starts things off with a bang with "Her Furry Face," a tale of an insensitive behavioral psychologist working with orangutans that have mastered the ability to communicate extensively via sign language. The psychologist's inability to deal with other humans leads him to pine for the affection of a certain orangutan, and... well, bad things happen.

K.W. Jeter's "The First Time" is a gripping story about a teenager indoctrinated to the debauchorous ways of his father and his friends. Jeter not only offers a new twist on the theme of vampirism, he also throws doubt on just who is the villain and who is the victim in such a liaison. Lies—both those we tell ourselves and those we tell others—are the crux of the matter in Bruce McAllister's "When The Fathers Go," wherein a space traveler returns from a long journey with some unpleasant news about an illicit affair and an illegitimate son for his wife. In "Dancing Chickens," Edward Bryant points out that there's no particular reason to believe that the morals and values of a visiting alien race would be any higher than our own. Connie Willis' "All My Darling Daughters" is perhaps the most chilling tale here, dealing as it does with the role that cruelty and dominance sometimes play in sex. Lewis Shiner's "Scales" is a close second, detailing the intrusion of a legendary lamia (a half-serpent, half-woman creature) into the comfortable life of a college professor.

The stories are enhanced by author's notes which describe the motivation and message behind each story. *Alien Sex* is not an exercise in extraterrestrial pornography, as one might imagine from the title; rather, it is a fine collection dealing with the sexual fears, insecurities, and obsessions that we humans tend to harbor.

Grand Guignol En Español

By
Lowrence
McCollum

some eerie camera work and an energetic performance by rugged

Mexican leading man, Ramon Gay.

Futurama

released ROBOT VS.

THE AZTEC MUMMY

Many of us who grew up in the 1950s and '60s enjoyed a wide variety of foreign-made thrillers at our local neighborhood theaters. While munching on snacks, we could savor the bad acting and pseudo-science of the newest Toho thriller, or softly laugh at the poor dubbing of the latest Italian horror job. The British did their horror far better and, during the golden days of Hammer, we enjoyed many of their slick, well-acted reworkings of cliché horror tales. Unfortunately, we rarely saw good distribution being given to any of the atmospheric, low-budget thrillers being produced in Mexico.

Now, let's take a look at a good helping of Hispanic horror, examining both the familiar and the largely unknown titles originating south of the border. Mexico's Azteca Films turned out many cheaply made black and white shockers between 1957 and 1966. Most were imitations of films produced during the classic age of Universal horror films, with stories being transposed to a Mexican setting. The basic premise of Universal's THE MUMMY'S HAND (1940), for example, was utilized by Azteca for THE AZTEC MUMMY (LA MOMIA AZTECA) in 1957. This initial effort and a number of sequels remained largely unseen in the U.S. with the exception of Futurama's highly promoted release of Rafael Portillo's ROBOT VS. THE AZTEC MUMMY (1959). The latter film pitted ruthless grave robbers against the resurrected mummy of an Aztec high priest who spends much of his time searching for his lost sweetheart, now reincarnated as a Mexican film star. In the frantic climax, the mummy defeats a lethal robot in mortal combat while the other villains perish in a suitably gruesome fashion. The film is basically a crude, heavy-handed effort, featuring

on a double-bill with Fernando Cortes' THE VAMPIRE'S COFFIN (1958), starring the distinguished character actor German Robles in the lead role. Robles specialized in portraying off-beat characters and is regarded as an intelligent non-conformist who has dabbled in the occult as an unusual hobby. THE VAMPIRE'S COFFIN (EL ATAUD DEL VAMPIRO) is nothing more than a clichéd tale about a vampiric count who returns from the dead to pursue voluptuous young women in modern-day Mexico City. After claiming several victims, he is finally dispatched in a tense struggle with an unusually athletic young doctor (Abel Salazar). German Robles delivers a fairly restrained performance and avoids the tendency to over-

play a bizarre role (a flaw other horror actors are frequently guilty of). Abel Salazar, well cast physically as the hero, is able to handle the strenuous action sequences with comparative ease while

bringing an air of casual charm to his mild romantic scenes with winsome Ariadne Welter. Salazar resembles an unlikely cross between John Cassavetes and Dane Clark, making him a popular Mexican heartthrob in the early sixties. Director Cortes effectively utilizes his thin material by endowing the film with the same shadowy atmosphere seen in Michael Curtiz' thrillers of the 1930s. THE VAMPIRE'S COFFIN may have been considered mediocre by American standards, but was somewhat better than average for an Azteca production.

Even more effective, but not as widely seen, was the Pan-World release of THE BLACK PIT OF DR. M (1961), originally produced in Mexico as MISTERIOS DE ULTRATUMBA (MYSTERIES FROM BEYOND THE GRAVE). The story, set in the Philippines, takes place in an insane asylum



where the brilliant Dr. Messala attempts to probe the mysteries of death with unexpectedly terrifying results. Through the use of a medium, a pact is made between Messala and the spirit of a dead colleague, Harrison Alderman. In the event that he should suffer an untimely demise, Messala is promised renewed life through the intervention of supernatural forces. The doctor soon finds that the denizens of the spirit world, in their own amoral way, have remained frighteningly loyal to their bargain. When Messala is unjustly arrested and executed for the murder of one of his patients, the doctor's soul quickly finds a new home—in the acid-scarred body of the real murderer! The



I left it in the cave and now it smells

tragic cycle of events continues when Messala makes his first open appearance and fails to convince anyone of his real identity. "I am Messala," he cries. "Trapped in the body of Elmer, a hellish mutation!" A feverishly scribbled note is soon discovered and its' contents identify the disfigured Elmer as the actual murderer of the mental patient. It appears that the reputation of the 'late' Dr. Messala will be cleared, only for the doctor to be executed a second time in the body of another man. After a frantic struggle, the Messala-Elmer entity attempts to escape, but suffers a horrible death by fire. Messala's friends and colleagues mourn the loss of a man who brazenly tampered in God's domain. The role of Dr. Messala

is effectively underplayed by Gaston Santos, who usually acted in Azteca's straight adventure films. Rafael Bertrand is equally restrained as the young doctor who emerges as the film's hero, while Mapita Cortes is a bit weak in the female lead. This shuddery, well-photographed effort survives a few corny moments and manages to create the sort of dark, moody atmosphere that fans are accustomed to seeing in some of Mario Bava's low-budget Italian-made thrillers. A lively rehash of horror clichés came in the 1963 U.S. release of ORLAK—THE HELL OF FRANKENSTEIN (ORLAK—EL INFIERNO DE FRANKENSTEIN). The film relates the story of a physician, well-respected in Mexico City, who is secretly carrying on the horrible legacy of his family name—the infamous Frankensteins. Unknown to his lovely daughter, Rosa, Dr. Frankenstein has been conducting experiments in a hidden laboratory where he is attempting to create an artificial man. The doctor is assisted by Pedro, a condemned murderer, once hanged and revived from the dead by Frankenstein. The sinister pair conduct a series of kidnappings and grave-robbings to provide the 'raw materials' for Frankenstein's unholy endeavors. Although Pedro is enamored of Rosa and fears for her safety, he must obey the wishes of the doctor upon whom he owes his very existence. Frankenstein finally succeeds in giving life to his creation which, at first, has been endowed with a radio-controlled metal head. The doctor eventually decides to replace the mechanical device with a human head and that decision proves to have horrible consequences. His creation, now functioning with a malevolent will of its own, turns on the doctor and brutally kills him. Pedro is wounded, but manages to make his way to police headquarters and warn the authorities of the existence of the rampaging monster. Before he dies, Pedro informs the police that innocent Rosa is now the creature's hostage.

Rosa's fiancé, a young police detective, rushes madly to the Frankenstein mansion while an armed rescue party is still being organized. A fierce struggle ensues and Rosa is seized from the monster's clutches. The two young lovers flee for their lives as Frankenstein's monster grimly pursues them. A heavily armed patrol arrives in the nick of time

and the inhuman fiend is destroyed in a burst of gunfire with machine-gun bullets, tearing away its hideous head. Another Azteca production given limited release in 1963 was *THE WITCH'S MIRROR (EL ESPEJO DE LA BRUJA)*. This film starred Antonio Calve as a ruthless man who murders his wife so that he can marry another woman (Rosita Arenas). The forces of black magic claim both the murderer and his female accomplice as the dead woman's mother, a vindictive witch, begins a gruesome campaign of terror against the pair. A spell is cast on Ms. Arenas, who is transformed into a horribly disfigured madwoman. After seizing a pair of scissors, she attacks her husband and viciously stabs him to death. The witch, in the meantime, changes into an owl and flies away! Despite many lapses in logic, this silly but frightening film succeeds fairly well on its own terms. *THE MASTER OF HORROR* (1965) was widely distributed in the U.S., though the film's Mexican origins remain rather vague. This badly dubbed thriller consists of two Edgar Allan Poe stories linked together by a weak framing story (a maid reading Poe's stories on a stormy night). "The Case of M. Valdemar," despite a nice period setting, takes itself much too seriously, making a fairly routine sociological statement about the mistreatment of the poor and the seriously ill. "The Cask of Amontillado" is given a pleasantly lightweight treatment, but lacks atmosphere and takes much too long to convey the proper sense of horror to the audience. Apparently, a third story was removed from the film before its U.S. release, which accounts for a somewhat disjointed structure. Though basically a failure, it's refreshing to see an Azteca production based on classic works of horror, rather than the more typical shop-worn themes that the studio often employed. A number of Mexican horror films were purchased by the late Jerry Warren, a producer-director who based much of his career on the creation of 'new' movies based on foreign inserts. ADP's 1965 release of Warren's *FACE OF THE SCREAMING WEREWOLF* consists mainly of footage taken from Azteca's 1959 effort entitled *LA CASA DEL TERROR (THE HOUSE OF TERROR)*. Lon Chaney, Jr. stars in this thriller about a mad scientist reviving a mummified werewolf. Warren shot several U.S. sequences starring

Donald Harron, who really must have been desperate for movie roles. Mexican comedian Tin Tan starred in the original Mexican version, but turns up only for a few moments as a night watchman in the U.S. release. This poor shocker was usually co-featured with Warren's hacked-up version of *CURSE OF THE STONE HAND*. John Carradine and Katherine Victor acted in a few minutes of American footage inserted in the latter effort. Warren tampered less with *CREATURE OF THE WALKING DEAD* (1966), an ADP revision of a Mexican film shot in 1960. The story concerns the reclusive Dr. Maltes (Rock Madison), who uses his newly discovered chemical formula to revive his long-



Who left the window open?

dead grandfather, an equally gifted chemist scorned by medical men of his time. The completely rejuvenated ancestor imprisons his own grandson and takes advantage of a strong family resemblance by assuming the young man's identity. When the elder Maltes finds himself aging rapidly, he discovers that frequent blood transfusions are needed to reverse the aging process. After claiming several victims, he seizes the wife of his grandson and prepares to drain her completely of blood. Luckily, young Maltes manages to break free of his bonds and engages in a tense struggle with the madman, finally overcoming the fiend and escaping with his terrified spouse. The final scene has the

hideously aged Maltes raging incoherently as the laboratory is engulfed in flames. "Life! Life," he screams, until his mad cries are muffled by the intense crackling of the flames.

Despite Jerry Warren's typically inept American footage, CREATURE still emerges as a reasonably enjoyable thriller. Director Fernando Cortes creates a number of creepy scenes set in graveyards and darkened rooms, while also managing to provide several exciting action sequences. The dual role of the idealistic Dr. Maltes and his cold, ruthless grandfather is handled with exceptional competence by Rock Madison, who once starred in Warren's MANBEAST (1955). Although the script seems



*Jose and Juan examine the corpses
of the Republican party.*

to be a conscious imitation of Hammer's far better THE MAN WHO COULD CHEAT DEATH (1959), there are enough good ingredients in CREATURE for the film to deserve attention. American-International released a small package of poorly dubbed Mexican thrillers to television in the mid-1960s. One of these films was THE CURSE OF THE DOLL PEOPLE (1960), shot by Azteca as LOS MNECOS INFERNALES (THE DEVIL DOLL MEN). Ramon Gay and Elvira Quintana star as a young couple who encounter a deadly curse that animates a collection of tiny, seemingly innocuous dolls to be used as instruments of murder. Although Tod Browning's DEVIL DOLL (1936) handled a similar premise more effectively, this atmos-

pheric Azteca-AIP effort generates some good suspense in a few sequences. Other AIP-TV releases included several intriguing titles seen all too rarely on the small screen. CURSE OF THE CRYING WOMAN (1960) starring Abel Salazar and Rosita Arenas as a young couple who find that visitations by a weeping spirit precede a series of disturbing events. Mauricio Garcés encounters horror in THE WORLD OF THE VAMPIRES (1961), while Abel Salazar battles a zombie-like baron in THE BRAINIAC (1963). INVASION OF THE VAMPIRES (1963) stars Tito Junco as a crafty young doctor who discovers a coven of vampires. All of these films would have made perfect second features for some of AIP's double bills, but were instead given only limited exposure on the boob tube. Among the Mexican features released directly to TV by other distributors in the mid-sixties, one would find several thrillers starring horror veteran German Robles in the role of Nostradamus, an impeccably dressed nobleman who happens to be a vampire. Originally done as a ten-part serial for Mexican TV in 1960, NOSTRADAMUS was edited into 4 feature films for American viewers. THE BLOOD OF NOSTRADAMUS (LA SANGRE DE NOSTRADAMUS) has Robles involved in many gruesome exploits in his attempts to organize a cult of vampires until he is finally dispatched by resourceful police inspector Julio Aleman. The three sequels include THE CURSE OF NOSTRADAMUS (LA MALDICION DE NOSTRADAMUS), NOSTRADAMUS AND THE MONSTER DEMOLISHER (NOSTRADAMUS Y EL DESTRUCTOR DE LOS MONSTRUOS), and NOSTRADAMUS AND THE GENII OF DARKNESS (NOSTRADAMUS Y EL GENIO DE LOS TINIEBLOS). Though contrived and predictable, the films have an abundance of atmosphere and fast action. The films were released to American TV in 1965.

There is no shortage of colorful heroes or evil villains in the several Mexican serials that became the basis for feature-length TV movies. A masked wrestler named Santo (The Saint) was a very popular character appearing in both film and Mexican television. This fictional hero first appeared in a 1952 melodrama entitled EL ENMASCARADO DE PLATA (THE SILVER MASK). Several years later, Santo made a successful

comeback both as a TV hero and a Saturday matinee idol. The role of Santo remained uncredited, but a pair of actors named Rodolfo Huerta and Eric Castillo are known to have portrayed the part at one time or another. Audiences thrilled to one adventure after another as the burly, silver-masked nemesis of evil fought a wide assortment of horrific villains. The following titles provide a colorful sampling of the exploits of The Saint (sometimes called Samson in the dubbed American versions). SANTO VS. THE ZOMBIES (1961); SAMSON VS. THE VAMPIRE WOMEN (1961); SAMSON IN THE WAX MUSEUM (1964); SAMSON ATTACKS THE WITCHES (1963). The great success of the Santo features spawned a number of imitations in the early sixties. BLACK-MASKED NEUTRON (EUTRON ENMASCADERO NEGRO), shot in 1960, concerns a mysterious crimefighter who battles monstrous opponents in a series of six films produced by Mexico's America Studios. Neutron's arch-enemy is Dr. Caronte, whose constant attempts to obtain the formula for the Neutron bomb are thwarted by our hero. THE BLUE DEMON (EL DEMONIO AZUL - 1962) is a masked athlete who fought crime in several films but lacked the popularity of Santo. THE RETURN OF THE MONSTER (EL REGRESO DE MONSTRUO - 1961) revolves around the body-snatching plots of a crazed scientist and his monster-assistant foiled by a lesser-known muscle-bound hero dubbed The Scarlet Fox. Many of these films dealing with costumed crusaders and their fiendish enemies have received a certain amount of TV exposure (usually at an ungodly hour!). A great many fantastic films shot in Mexico have never been dubbed into English and are virtually unknown to American audiences. Mexican horror addicts in the early 60s enjoyed such films as MACARIO (MACABRE), a supernatural thriller in which God, Satan, and Death appear as human beings. The atmospheric PHANTOM OF THE CONVENT (EL FANTASMA DEL CONVENTO) has three travelers becoming involved with several monks, unaware that the holy men are actually long-dead mummies come back to life. PEPITO AND THE MONSTER (PEPITO Y EL MONSTRUO) concerns a naughty nino who skips school and encounters a Jekyll/Hyde-like fiend who relentlessly stalks him. A MODERN BLUEBEARD (EL

MODERNO BARBA-AZUL) stars Buster Keaton (!) as an astronaut who finds that his trip to the moon has actually landed him near an insane asylum. The following shockers, never released in the United States, have titles that are at least interesting, if not outlandishly intriguing. BARU'S SAVAGE WORLD; THE BLACK SKULL; THE MONSTER IN THE SHADOW; THE SHIP OF THE MONSTERS; THE SUPER FEMALES; THE MONSTER OF THE VOLCANOES; THE MYSTERIES OF BLACK MAGIC; THE HEAD OF PANCHITO VILLA; THE VENGEANCE OF THE HANGED; HELL-FACE.

Despite the patronizing condescension that American horror buffs have shown toward Mexico's B-chillers, there is still an air of nostalgia surrounding such low-budget programmers. Many horror films produced during the sixties tried to conceal their 'B' origins beneath a veneer of near-medium budget slickness. Psychological formulas and sociological statements were injected into efforts that utilized what was basically shallow, sensationalized material. Mexican thrillers of the same period are generally straightforward, action-packed black and white efforts that achieve the same level of entertainment value seen in unpretentious American productions of the 1940s. The pleasurable eerie, untaxing vehicles of German Robles, Abel Salazar, and other Azteca horror favorites have provided many hours of sheer escapism. Though often neglected by theatrical and video distributors, many of these films can occasionally be viewed simply by tuning in your local Spanish language channel—and bringing into focus a whole new world of horror.

Ⓛ

*They're back.
They're hungry.
And they're...*

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EDITORS' NOTE:

As mentioned in this issue's editorial (as well as in Peter's *Famous Magazines of Monsterland* column last issue), the 30th issue of *The Monster Times* has held a special place in the hearts of *TMT* editors Bob and Peter since it appeared on the newsstands nearly twenty years ago (Scoleri was still in his playpen at the time). The staff of *TMT* compiled a handful of articles on the worst comics and films of all time. While not the first to capitalize on fans' fondness for junk (the first, we believe, was Joe Dante's scathing attack on "The 50 worst horror films" published as "Dante's Inferno" way back in *Famous Monsters* #18, July 1962), *TMT* was the first to devote an entire issue to the stuff.

We thought it would be neat to reprint *TMT*'s listing of the worst horror films, and with the kind permission of *TMT* co-creator Leslie Waldstein, we're doing just that. Remember that the issue appeared in 1974, so none of the wonderful films released after that date are included. We present the article as it first appeared, with only minor editing (a few references to articles in past issues of *TMT* have been removed), and we hope you enjoy it as much as we do.

MONSTERS AND CREATURES AND VAMPIRES AND GORILLAS AND ZOMBIES AND MOVIEMAKERS.

THE WORLD'S FIFTY WORST MONSTER FILMS EVER

BY

JASON THOMAS AND JOE KANE

1 ASTOUNDING SHE MONSTER (1958). Ronnie Ashcroft. The title character spends a lot of time pursuing the rest of the tiny cast through the woods, while an offscreen narrator tries desperately to hold some kind of plot together. Recommended as a late night sleeping aid only. With Robert Clarke, Kenne Duncan, Marilyn Harvey.

2 ASTRO ZOMBIES (1968). Ted Mikel. John Carradine and his demented hunchback henchman produce battery-operated "astro zombies" in a dingy basement lab while government agents trail nefarious foreign spies with both Russian and Mexican accents. Its chief crime is its 94 minute running time. With Wendell Corey, Tura Satana, Rafael Campos.

3 ATTACK OF THE GIANT LEECHES (1959). Bernard L. Kowalski. The first ten minutes are fairly good, but then the plot takes an enormous dip into subterranean depths. The most expensive items used are a few small explosives and two cheap-looking leech costumes

that are supposed to be intelligent and blood-thirsty! With Ken Clark, Yvette Vickers, Bruno VeSota.

4 BELA LUGOSI MEETS A BROOKLYN GORILLA (1953). William Beaudine. The two good guy "actors" are subhuman copies of Martin and Lewis. The plot is so bad that Lugosi must have been really desperate to do this one. To make things worse, the story ends right in the middle! With Duke Mitchell, Sammy Petrillo, Muriel Landers.

5 BILLY THE KID VS. DRACULA (1965). William Beaudine. It had to happen sometime. The film works so hard at being bad that it's not even good camp, although there are a number of classic bad lines. With John Carradine, Bing Russell, Melinda Plowman, Chuck Courtney.

6 BLOOD FEAST (1963). Herschell Gordon Lewis. The first in a long line of blood'n'gore movies, this one set the sickening standard the others have, unfortunately, lived up to. The bloodthirsty adventures of a mad Egyptian



caterer. With Connie Mason, Thomas Wood, Scott Arnold.

7 BLOOD OF ORACULA'S CASTLE (1969). Al Adamson. Not counting skinflicks, this is probably the worst Dracula movie ever made. Debonair Orac and his aging mate are living in a castle-in 20th century America-with a bulter (John Carradine, of course) and a demented oaf named Mango. We've seen bad Oracula films before, but this is the stake that must have really broken the grand vampire's heart. With Alex O'Arcy, Paula Raymond, Robert Olx

8 BRIDE OF THE MONSTER (1956). Ed Wood Jr. This, one of Lugosi's last features, is a real loser. He's a scientist who's trying to turn men (and women) into mindless giants. His first success is with "Lobo" (Tor Johnson), who was a mindless giant to begin with. In the end, Lugosi suffers the same fate shortly before he's eaten up by a rubber octopus. With Ed Parker, William Benedict, Loretta King.

9 CAPE CANAVERAL MONSTERS (1960). Phil Tucker. The title for this winner should have been **TEENAGE GENIUSES MEET THE CAPE CANAVERAL CREEPS**. The only good thing about this insipid alien invasion garbage is the ending, mostly just because it's just that. With Scott Peters, Katherine Victor, Jason Johnson.

10 CAPTIVE WOMEN (1952). Stuart Gilmore. A vision of a fun city of the future (29th century) that's even more horrible than the present one. This inept, plodding effort features barbarians and mutants-victims of atomic warfare-battling it out in the wrecked subway stations of a destroyed New York City. With schlock it's loaded. With Robert Clarke, Margaret Field, William Schallert, Ron Randell.

11 CAT-WOMEN OF THE MOON (1954). Arthur Hilton. Enjoyably terrible flick has usual crew of bland, sexist 50s spacemen landing on planet inhabited solely by beautiful "babes." They're greeted with a casual "Welcome to the moon", delivered in great deadpan style. With Sonny Tufts, Victor Jory, Marie Windsor, William Phipps.

12 CREATURE OF OESTRUCION (1967). Larry Buchanan. A cheap, awful remake of **SHE CREATURE**, which wasn't terribly terrific the first time around. The production looks like it was

scripted and directed by a talentless hack (which it was!) The "monster", which was also employed in **IT'S ALIVE!**, is a wet suit with claws attached and a funny face painted on! With Les Tremayne, Pat Delaney, Aron Kincaid.

13 CURSE OF THE SWAMP CREATURE (1966). Larry Buchanan. This is another zinger that's reserved for the late, late show. John Agar's worst film to date, in which he does nothing but sit around and smoke cigarettes. The most elaborate thing in the show is a 10c fright mask. With Francine York, Bill Thurman.

14 DEATH CURSE OF TARTU (1967). William Grefe. A group of people meet up with a zombie who can assume the form of any living creature on Earth. Sounds good, but it wasn't. A lot of animals guest star in this farce, and they seem to be more intelligent than the actors. Incidentally, even the conclusion of this bomb is unacceptable. With Fred Pinero, Babette Sherrill, Sherman Hayes.

15 DR. TERROR'S GALLERY OF HORRORS (1967). David L. Hewitt. Not one atrocious tale, but five of them! Awful acting, stolen plots, wooden dialogue, poor color, abysmal acting, atrocious etc. With John Carradine and Lon Chaney tool With Rochelle Hudson, Roger Gentry, Vic McGee.

16 THE EVIL BRAIN FROM SPACE (1958). Chogei Akasaka. Japan outdid itself with this one. The monsters come close to being good, but the heroes, plot, script and direction (did I forget anything?) are incredibly bad. Throughout the film, Starman, an Oriental superhero, gets to practice acrobatics with the agile villains and toss obvious dummies around. With Ken Utsui, Junko Ikeuchi, Reiko Seto.

17 THE EYE CREATURES (1965). Larry Buchanan. This is a grade-Z remake of **INVASION OF THE SAUCER MEN**, which was bad enough in its original form! In this version, the "teenagers" have been replaced by young men, the Air Force personnel are unusually slow-witted, and the creatures have shot up to normal size. Don't even see the original, although it was better. With John Ashley, Shirley McLane, Cynthia Hull.

18 FIRE MAIDENS FROM OUTER SPACE (1965). Cy Roth. Except for the classical music and the

nice-looking ladies, there's nothing enjoyable about this dud. The descendants of Atlantis are alive and well on another planet, menaced by a nut in black tights and a halloween mask! The producer risked his entire fortune by buying real smoke bombs for this low-budget catastrophe. With Anthony Dexter, Paul Carpenter, Susan Shaw.

19 FRANKENSTEIN MEETS THE SPACE MONSTER (1965). Robert Gaffney. This was supposedly meant to be tongue-in-cheek, and it sure succeeded! Franky is a crazy robot, the monster is a clumsy muscleman, the actors and actresses are emotionless and the plot is asinine. And it all takes place in Puerto Rico. With James Karen, Marilyn Hanold, David Kerman.

20 GODZILLA VS. THE SMOG MONSTER (1971). This could have been good as a straight flick, but somebody decided to make it into an idiotic kiddie show! The villainous smog-eater is original and kinda cute, but the theme song can drive you right up a ceiling. Sorry, Big G. fans. With Godzilla, Smog Monster.

21 HOMICIDAL (1961). William Castle. While not a quick cheape like most of the films cited here nor, in light of subsequent films, excessively bloody, HOMICIDAL still managed to create an ambience of sufficient tastelessness to make this list. The brutal decapitation of an elderly woman was the picture's high point in terms of revulsion. With Glenn Corbett, Patricia Breslin, James Westerfield, Jean Arless.

22 HORROR OF PARTY BEACH (1964). Del Tenney. (Filmbook in The Monster Times #30).

23 I DRINK YOUR BLOOD (1971). David Durston. Horace Bones, freelance ritualistic killer, leads a band of crazed "hippies" on an orgy of bloodletting. As inept as it is offensive. With Bhaskar, Jadine Wong.

24 I EAT YOUR SKIN (1964). Del Tenney. Not as bad as I DRINK YOUR BLOOD, this flick about hungry zombies and evil voodoo doin's on a Caribbean island is terrible enough in its own right to warrant a spot on this list. From the same people who brought you THE HORROR OF

PARTY BEACH. With William Joyce, Heather Hewitt, Walter Coy.

25 INVASION OF THE ANIMAL PEOPLE (1960). Jerry Warren. A foreign flick, with American scenes added, dealing with Eskimos menaced by outer space creatures. The shaggy titan looks sick, and the miniature sets would have looked better if they had been Aurora models. John Carradine narrated, but he was smart enough not to show his face in this mess, except in the film's prologue. With Robert Burton, Barbara Wilson.

26 INVASION OF THE STAR CREATURES (1961) Bruno VeSota. The second worst science-fiction movie ever made. Two dogfaces try to be funny (and fail terribly) when captured by a pair of amazons and their walking salad-men. The stock footage from TV's ROCKY JONES, SPACE RANGER is enjoyable for nostalgia freaks, but that only lasts a few seconds. With Bob Ball, Frankie Ray, Gloria Victor, Dolores Reed.

27 IT'S ALIVE! (1968). Larry Buchanan. Crazy man captures people and feeds them to a fellow wearing a ludicrous zipper suit with teeth. (Shades of CREATURE OF DESTRUCTION!) This one is so bad that TV doesn't even air it before 1 AM. With Tommy Kirk, Shirley Bonne, Carveth Austerhouse.

28 JESSE JAMES MEETS FRANKENSTEIN'S DAUGHTER (1965). William Beaudine. You can't fight the inevitable! Jesse James sees brawny sidekick turned into a monster named "Igor" and confronts the mad Maria Frankenstein while cardboard sets continually threaten to topple in mid-scene. With John Lupton, Cal Bolder, Narda Onyx.

29 KILLER SHREWS (1959). Ray Kellogg. The old HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES gimmick is used in this imbecilic production. Absurd masks are tied onto angry dogs (who are probably angry because of the masks), and we're expected to believe they're gigantic shrews! Awful. With James Best, Ingrid Goude, Ken Curtis.

30 LATITUDE ZERO (1969). Inoshiro Honda.



Cesar Romero is at his worst in this inept science-fiction "thriller". The usual super-city beneath the sea is used in the picture, and it's being menaced by Romero and his mutated creatures. Remember the good old days, when he and Joseph Cotten (yup, he's in it too) used to be fairly good? Well, they're gone forever! With Akira Takarada, Patricia Medina, Richard Jaeckel.

31 **MONSTER A GO-GO** (1965). The title alone should keep away anyone with smarts. It's the usual astronaut-goes-up-normal-and-comes-down-strange theme, this time having the spaceman (a real ugly chap) grow to about 50 feet tall. It's a combination of the worst elements of a number of flicks, and rather revolting. With Phil Morton, June Travis, George Perry.

32 **MONSTER FROM THE OCEAN FLOOR** (1954). Wyatt Ordung. This one had good potential, but the script could have used more appearances by the monster. We almost never see it. When we finally do see the thing, it's nothing but a small model being manipulated via very visible strings! With Anne Kimball, Stuart Wade, Wyatt Ordung.

33 **MONSTER FROM THE SURF (AKA BEACH GIRLS AND THE MONSTERS)** (1965). Jon Hall. Jon Hall attempts to relieve surfside boredom by donning sea monster suit and doing in local lovelies. Incredibly cheap, dull and slow-witted. Watch it if you must-but you'll hate yourself in the morning. With Sue Casey, Walker Edmiston, Read Morgan.

34 **MONSTROSITY** (1964). Joseph Mascelli. Apt title for abominable film about transplanting old lady's brain into bodies of nubile upstairs maids. Even the zombies are duller than usual. With Frank Gerstle, Erika Peters, Judy Bamber.

35 **MY SON, THE VAMPIRE** (1952). John Gilling. Another Lugosi loser. He's supposed to be a vampire, but may not be. In any event, he's a mad scientist who's out to get a transvestite! The robot is cute, but too easily dismantled. Made as a British comedy, it's actually rather pitiful. With Arthur Lucan, Hattie Jacques.

36 **NAVY VS. THE NIGHT MONSTERS** (1965). Michael A. Hoey. The "actors" are considerably less talented than the plants (and they're fake!).

The two harried heroines are worth ogling at, if that's your bent, but they don't appear in enough of the footage. Read a book instead! With Anthony Eisely, Mamie Van Doren, Pamela Mason, Bill Gray.

37 **PLAN 9 FROM OUTER SPACE** (1956). Ed Wood, Jr. Just before he died, Bela Lugosi made some scenes for this sci-fi dud. Tor Johnson (who talks for a moment!) and Vampira are also cast as zombies raised from their graves by alien invaders. The script and everything else were highly helpful in making this one of the biggest wastes of time ever. With Gregory Walcott, Lyle Talbot, Mona McKinnon.

38 **QUEEN OF OUTER SPACE** (1958). Edward Bernds. Bland 50s space crew crashlands on Venus and find Zsa Zsa Gabor, the only Venusian with a Hungarian accent. "How could a bunch of women come up with a gizmo like that?" asks a crew member about scientific invention...Not only is this film terrible, but sexist to boot! With Eric Fleming, Laurie Mitchell, Paul Birch.

39 **SANTA CLAUS CONQUERS THE MARTIANS** (1964). Nicholas Webster. Absolutely the worst science-fiction flick ever made, bar none! With John Call, Leonard Hicks.

40 **SCARED TO DEATH** (1947). Christy Cabanne. **BORED TO DEATH** would be a more appropriate title for this "sleeper" (narrated by a woman's corpse, no less!) We wish we could say this was Bela Lugosi's worst, but he went on to top himself in **BRIDE OF THE MONSTER** and other terror turkeys. With George Zucco, Joyce Compton.

41 **SHE DEMONS** (1959). Richard Cunha. Deranged Nazi scientist dabbles in scar tissue experiments that result in the creation of the title creatures. Bad acting and direction perfectly compliment abominable script. With Tod Griffin, Irish McCalla, Victor Sen Yung.

42 **SLIME PEOPLE** (1963). Robert Hutton. The creatures are walking garbage heaps with spears. They've come up from beneath the earth to take over, and they're super-strong and nearly indestructible. And powerful ugly, too. But they only come up in one place, and at the end of the movie the sloppy, slippy things are driven back into the soil-probably by the

terrible script. With Robert Hutton, Susan Hart, Robert Burton.

43 **TASTE OF BLOOD** (1967). Herschell Gordon Lewis. A slug from a bottle of Dracula's blood turns a businessman into a vampire. This one gets our vote as THE all-time worst horror movie, not only because of its dazzling ineptitude but because of its 2 hour running time. That's right-120 minutes of unspeakable boredom. Absolutely unforgivable. With Bill Rogers, Thomas Wood, Gail Janis.

44 **TEENAGE ZOMBIES** (1960) Jerry Warren. Dumb spies fulfill Nixon's dream by learning how to turn people into obedient robots. Some mindless "teenagers" manage to turn the tables on the villains and save the free world for internal, rather than foreign, manipulation. So hoist a flag, already! With Don Sullivan Steve Conte, Katherine Victor.

45 **UNDERTAKER AND HIS PALS** (1967). David C. Graham. Tasteless trash disguised as comedy serves as another cinematic excuse to maul, molest and mutilate a slew of hapless heroines. Former movie star Robert Lowery puts in an embarrassed cameo appearance. With Ray Dennis, Warren Ott, Rad Fulton.

46 **UNTAMED WOMEN** (1952) Merle Coe. Enjoyably atrocious yarn about shipwrecked crew landing on island teeming with prehistoric monsters (all stock footage), hairy cave-men, and untamed women. Contains the immortal line, "Shoot anything with hair that moves." With Doris Merrick, Mikel Conrad, Morgan Jones.

47 **VOODOO MAN** (1944). William Beaudine. Anyone who lives through seeing this atrocity wonders why a voodoo priest would work in a gas station. The flick could have been a lot worse, but it was saved by the fact that it was only an hour long. Probably Carradine's first bad role, although Lugosi was quite good in it. Despite the fair efforts of Bela and George Zucco, however, the film was a real loser. With Wanda McKay, Henry Hall.

48 **YEAR-2889** (1968). Larry Buchanan. A rotten remake of THE DAY THE WORLD ENDED, which could have used some help as it was. This version is far worse, however, because of non-actors and crummy make-up. With Paul

Peterson, Charla Doarty, Quinn O'Hara.

49 **ZOMBIES ON BROADWAY** (1945). Gordon Douglas. Two zanies conduct a zombie hunt for a New York nightclub act, but run into interference in the form of Bela Lugosi, a prisoner of yet another grade-Z movie. The only good thing about the film is its title, which sounds more like cinema verite in our book. With Wally Brown, Alan Carney, Sheldon Leonard.

50 **ZONTAR, THE THING FROM VENUS** (1966). Larry Buchanan. A rotten remake of IT CONQUERED THE WORLD. By not sticking to new versions of already terrible films, Buchanan's cinematic crimes become more serious. See the original instead, which wasn't terrible on the contrary, it was perfectly mediocre. With John Agar, Anthony Houston, Susan Bjurman.

Dishonorable Mentions:

ATTACK OF THE MAYAN MUMMY, BEAST OF BLOOD, BLOOD THIRST, BLOODTHIRSTY BUTCHERS, BOWERY AT MIDNIGHT, BRAIN THAT WOULDN'T DIE, CAPTIVE WILD WOMEN, COLOR ME BLOOD RED, CREATURE FROM THE HAUNTED SEA, CRY OF THE BANSHEE, CURSE OF NOSTRADAMUS, DAY THE EARTH FROZE, DEVIL GIRL FROM MARS, DIABOLICAL DR. Z, DISEMBODIED, DUNGEON OF HORROR, EEGAH, FLYING SERPENT, FRANKENSTEIN 1970, FRANKENSTEIN'S DAUGHTER, FROM HELL IT CAME, GHASTLY ONES, GHOST OF DRAGSTRIP HOLLOW, HOW TO MAKE A MONSTER, I WAS A TEENAGE FRANKENSTEIN, INCREDIBLE PETRI-FIED WORLD, INVASION USA, KING DINOSAUR, MAD DOCTOR OF BLOOD ISLAND, MESA OF LOST WOMEN, MISSILE TO THE MOON, RETURN OF THE APEMAN, ROBOT MONSTER, TEENAGERS FROM OUTER SPACE, TORTURE DUNGEON, 2000 MANIACS, UNKNOWN TERROR, VOYAGE TO THE PLANET OF PREHISTORIC WOMEN, WASP WOMAN, WIZARD OF MARS, and many, many more.

B

EDITORS' NOTE

And now, the other "formative experience" mentioned in this issue's editorial—a baker's dozen worth of horrible horrors, compiled by Robert Hadji and originally printed in *Rod Serling's Twilight Zone Magazine*. Here it is once again, for your reading pleasure, courtesy of Montcalm Publishing. The titles are in alphabetical order, by author, as originally presented.

13 WORST STINKERS OF THE WEIRD

SELECTED BY
R.S. HADJI

1. *The Sorrows of Sotan* by Marie Corelli
The worst sort of Victorian tripe, sentimental, vulgar and monumentally boring. Her contemporary critics evidently felt much the same way.
2. *Unholy Relics* by M.P. Dare
Dreadful ghost stories, in the M.R. James tradition, poorly written and ripe with embarrassing imagery. Freudians would have a field day with.
3. *Count Dracula's Canadian Affair* by Otto Fredrick
Dracula vs. the Mounties during the North-West Rebellion of 1885. Need I say more?
4. *The Grip of Fear* by Vern Hansen
Evidently a shaky one, this being the second most inept collection of weird tales I've ever read. The "author" is blissfully innocent of such niceties as imagination, style, or grammar.
5. *Rest in Agony* by Ivar Jorgensen
A pulpy-to-rotten diabolic thriller, much worse than any of *The Exorcist's* misbegotten progeny.
6. *Drocutwig* by Mallory T. Knight
Vampire dollybird takes on sixties "Swinging London." I burned my copy some years back, and have not been troubled since.
7. *The Transition of Titus Crow* by Brian Lumley
"Doe not callie up Any wordes that you cannot put downe in readable prose, lest Yogge-Sothoth drye yr Ink in the pen, and eate yr face."
—Claus Vomitius.
8. *The Vampire Tapes* by Arabella Randolphe
Howlingly bad imitation of *Interview with the Vampire*.
9. *Suffer the Children* by John Saul
A vile book, just shy of "kiddie porn." The real horror is that this was a bestseller!
10. *Celloars* by John Shirley
The most thoroughly disgusting horror thriller in recent memory, a declaration of war on all standards of taste in the genre.
11. *The Sucking Pit* by Guy N. Smith
The title say it all.
12. *The Lair of the White Worm* by Bram Stoker
A thoroughly demented book, at times unintentionally hilarious. The author evidently was half-mad when he wrote this, the absolute proof of same.
13. *The Vampire Baroness* by Violet Van Der Elst
Now this is the most inept collection I've ever read, a legendary British stinker. She also wrote poetry and songs—believe me, you don't want to know.



B



How We Rank The Rank

The *Scream Factory* Editors
Make their Picks for the
Worst of the Worst



This is the space where we give you our picks for the worst that this little genre of our has to offer. Now, keep in mind that we don't claim to have read and seen everything out there. In fact, we've attempted to avoid the crap just like (practically) everybody else. In other words, we don't claim that these are really the worst horror novels and books that you can find; they're simply the worst that we've had the misfortune to endure. There's certainly even worse fare out there, if you care to go looking for it!

FILMS

Enfantino

- 1 PRINCE OF DARKNESS (1988). The beginning of the end for the once-great John Carpenter. Outside of THE THING and the marginal STARMAN, the '80s were not kind to the director of HALLOWEEN. Can a remake of THE CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON restore some luster?
- 2 DEMONS (1985). A gory, crappy mess from frame one. Incomprehensible tripe from director Lamberto Bava and producer Dario Argento. Throw in CREEPERS (1984), also from the over-praised Argento, for good measure.
- 3 CHILDREN OF THE CORN (1984). One of Stephen King's best short stories gets flushed down a cinematic toilet. The acting's bad, there's no suspense, and, hey, how about that scary demonic duststorm at the climax? Easily the worst of the films based on King's work.

- 4 MAXIMUM OVERDRIVE (1986). But then again...
- 5 DAY OF THE DEAD (1985). George Romero finally delivers exactly what all the creepy gorehounds wanted. Less heart, more intestines. More brains delivered with no brains.
- 6 TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE PART 2 (1986). Tobe Hooper delivers up evidence that once is definitely enough.
- 7 I, MONSTER (1972). Snoozer version of Jekyll & Hyde with the usually reliable Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee.
- 8 NIGHT OF THE LEPUS (1972). The story of giant cannibal jackrabbits could have been fun (a la KINGDOM OF THE SPIDERS) if all involved hadn't have taken the whole thing so seriously.
- 9 LIFEFORCE (1985). Sure, like Gary Braunbeck, I can find a good thing or two in even the worst movies. This film simultaneously wins my awards for Worst Science Fiction/Horror film ever and Best Use of Breasts in Same.
- 10 FRIDAY THE 13TH (1980). I could have picked MY BLOODY VALENTINE, NEW YEAR'S EVIL, THE MUTILATOR, THE BURNING or dozens of other wastes of time, but F13 was the first. To add salt to the wound, Paramount sullied us with seven sequels.

Morriish

Disclaimer (sort of): Unlike my two co-editors, I haven't seen a huge number of bad horror films. Of course, I haven't seen many good horror films, either. From what I have

seen, it would be easy to put together a list consisting solely of '50s-era clunkers, but in order to offer some variety, I've listed some more recent "gems" as well.

- 1 THE GIANT CLAW (1957) You've got to see this film, if only to check out the giant, terrorizing turkey. If you look close, you really can see the wires on the bird and the miniature planes.
- 2 ATTACK OF THE 50-FOOT WOMAN (1958) Amazingly, incredibly, stupefyingly boring.
- 3 THE BURNING (1982) Among dozens (at least) of bad "slasher" films, this one stands out for its particularly pointless, mindless slaughter.
- 4 DRACULA VS. FRANKENSTEIN (1971) Lon Chaney, Jr., J. Carroll Naish, Russ Tamblyn and others, including Forrie Ackerman, embarrass themselves for low pay. What were these people thinking?
- 5 GODZILLA VS. THE SMOG MONSTER (1972) Unlike Sceler, I fail to find much rewarding about most of the 'zilla films (although I loved 'em when I was a tyke). This entry, in particular, combines a general kiddy mentality with a heavy-handed, preachy adult message.
- 6 ROBOT MONSTER (1953) An all-time classic of incompetence. A guy in an ape suit with a fish bowl over his head chases some idiots around in the high desert. If you drink enough, it's actually pretty amusing.
- 7 DAY OF THE DEAD (1985) See: people torn apart ad nauseum. See: weak, poorly-conceived attempts at camp humor. See: obnoxious over-acting throughout. See: ...on second thought, don't see it.
- 8 THE HILLS HAVE EYES II (1984) Director Wes Craven seems to have perfected the art of falling short of one's potential. On this one, he fell way short.
- 9 OF UNKNOWN ORIGIN (1983) I bet Peter Weiler wishes that he could burn all the prints of this "evil rat" film, which makes BEN look like an Oscar nominee.
- 10 HELLRAISER II (1990) Okay, okay, there are undoubtedly hundreds of horror films worse than this one. However, coming on the heels of a pretty damned good prequel, this one was horribly disappointing, and pretty stupid throughout.

(Dis)Honorabile Mention:

TRANSYLVANIA 6-5000 (1985) Go ahead, call it a comedy. Tell me that it shouldn't be included on a list of horror films. Then try to sit through it without screaming.

Sceler!

- 1 BLOOD SUCKING PHAROAH5 IN PITTSBURGH (1991) This film stands as proof that it takes more than Tom Savini's special effects to make a movie worth seeing.
- 2 CHILD'S PLAY (1988) Let sleeping dolls lie. Or should I say, this dog of a devil doll film does a good job as a sleep inducer.
- 3 RETURN TO SALEM'S LOT (1987) Let's not and say we did. These guys should give lessons on how to take a great book or film and add nothing to it by creating a sequel. Or maybe they do—let's see, now playing: PET SEMETARY TWO, CHILDREN OF THE CORN II.
- 4 SPONTANEOUS COMBUSTION (1989) Tobe Hooper once again proves himself to be a bonafide one-shot wonder. OK, OK, so maybe he actually did have something to do with POLTERGEIST. A spontaneous combustion would be welcome relief from this loser.
- 5 BODY PARTS (1992) You'd have thought they'd use the mind of a writer or eye of a director, but no, we're stuck with a hodgepodge of lunatic limbs that lust for liberation. Just say no!
- 6 SHOCKER (1989) Wes Craven almost had himself another series character until the *Leave It To Beaver* scene, when we all realized how we'd rather see the end of the *Beaver* episode than the rest of the movie.
- 7 PUPPETMASTER (1989) Yet another animated doll tale, this one coming from that discredited outlet for bad movie plots, Charles Band. No, I don't want to join the fan club!
- POPCORN (1991) Here's a flick that's one-upped by the movie within the movie. When you consider how lame "The Mosquito" is, that's pretty sad. Bury this one with that artificial butter flavoring.
- 9 REVENGE OF THE LIVING ZOMBIES (1989) This NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD rip-off was written and directed by the guy who played the first cemetery ghoul in the

Romero classic (he also stars!). Talk about milking a small role for the rest of your life. "Um, yes sir, I played a Gorfian in episode 22 of STAR TREK. Do you want my autograph?"

- 10 TETSUO: THE IRON MAN (1992) Hailed as a classic Japanese film by some obviously disturbed people, this 60 minute waste of time was so bad I left the theater with a headache. And no, the Sam Raimi rip-off sequences did not make it worth viewing. Steer clear of this trash—it's not recyclable.

BOOKS

Enfantino

- 1 *Night Of The Wolf* by Frank Belknap Long. Covered in this issue's FHS article.
- 2 *Dusk* by Ron Dee. Even with all the rotten vampire novels out there, this one wins hands down. Almost so bad it's funny.
- 3 *A Visit With The Shorts* by Roger Dale Trexler. The worst collection of stories ever produced on this planet.
- 4 *Sexpunks And Savage Sagas* by Richard Sutphen. 2nd-place winner for collections.
- 5 *The Kill* by Alan Ryan. A hard one. A novel with an exciting buildup and a criminally bad ending. A real cheat in that this could very well have been on a best-of list if Ryan hadn't blown the finish.
- 6 *Bonegrinder* by John Lutz. Have to agree with Bill Schoeli on this one. An ending so bad it makes *The Kill* look like a masterpiece. Should have been filmed as a *Murder, She Wrote* episode.
- 7 *Progeny* by J.G. Maxon. Evil janitor impregnates teenage girls. Wasn't this made into a Movie-of-the-Week with Susan Lucci? If not, it deserves to be.
- 8 *The Unseen King* by Tyson Blue. If I was Stephen King, and knew this guy had my address, I'd move...a long ways. Like maybe to the moon.
- 9 *Mystery* by Peter Straub. A controversial choice, to be sure. It's amazing to me that Straub followed up *Koko*, one of the best novels of the '80s, with a book that should have been titled *Obvious*. There is no mystery, there is no magic, there is only disappointment.

- 10 *The Face In The Abyss* by A. Merritt. Though technically a loooong novella, *Face* merits inclusion here because Donald Grant just issued this as a \$30 hardcover. Somninx is a hell of a lot cheaper.

(Dis)Honorable Mention:

The Talisman by King & Straub

Needful Things by Stephen King.

Two horrible first halves equal what? I could never make it all the way through either book, so I might be missing the great literary achievement of the century. But based on several hundred pages of junk, I think not.

Morriish

- 1 *The Breeze Horror* by Candace Capanegro. The most disgusting, execrable thing I've ever held in my hands (no, really!).
- 2 *Shadows* by Shaun Hutson. What a hack. Keep this guy over in Britain, at all costs.
- 3 *Sexpunks and Savage Sagas* by Richard Sutphen. Adolescent angst comes out of the closet. Fur burgers, dip sticks, bearded tacos—the mind reels.
- 4 *Night Tales* by John Tigges & Kevin Browne. An awesomely inept collection of clichés, apparently originally written as teleplays for *Tales From The Darkside*, which had the good sense to never actually produce any of them.
- 5 *Night Warriors* by Graham Masterton. Like a Marvel comic book—zap! pow!—except that it's not quite that high-brow.
- 6 *The Devil's Advocate* by Andrew Niederman. Here's Andy, before he was reincarnated as V.C. Niederman. The other book of Niederman's that I've read, *Illusion*, almost made my "bottom ten"—if I would've read enough of his stuff, I think he could've dominated this list.
- 7 *Behind The Door* by Frank Lambirth. Patients take over insane asylum and torture their former captors. Except for the one patient who took time out to write this book.
- 8 *Revenge Of The Manitou* by Graham Masterton. I wanted to put the prequel, *The Manitou*, on here, too, but I didn't want this list to become the exclusive property of

Graham. (However, I have read some good short stories by this guy)

- 9 *6:02* by Marc Clements. I wish I could have finished this book in six minutes and two seconds.
- 10 *Beastmaker* by James V. Smith. "Let's see, maybe if I write just like Dean Koontz, only a lot worse, maybe I can sell a novel." it worked! But the book sucks!

Scoleri

- 1 *The Tommyknockers* by Stephen King. Who would have thought that King could come up with a story less appealing than *Misery*, right after *Misery*? Despite numerous attempts, I have yet to be able to get beyond the halfway point in this book. Thank god he's been producing winners since this low point in his career.
- 2 *Gojira* by Mark Jacobson. Here's a knock-off on a popular figure in our culture, Godzilla, handled with the subtlety of a shotgun. Leave this one to the artsy-fartsy types who sip coffee while discussing literature. Literature? We're talking about rubber-suit monsters here!
- 3 *Queen Of The Damned* by Anne Rice. Ah, yes, the oh-so literate writer whose vampires soften the hearts and other organs of women everywhere. With this fiasco, she managed to disappoint even her more avid fans by pumping out a big yawn to make some big bucks.
- 4 *Psycho House* by Robert Bloch. Bloch sinks to the level of slasher film screenwriters in this by-the-numbers, create 'em and kill 'em finale of the PSYCHO saga. Plot twists abound to the point of outrageousness, succeeding in nothing more than insulting the reader.
- 5 *The Bad Place* by Dean Koontz. This is so bad, it should be inducted into the 'worst of' Hall of Fame. Bad prose, bad concepts, and bad characters run rampant in this tour de trash! For more in-depth info on how bad this book is, check out my no-holds-barred review in issue #7.
- 6 *The Unseen King* by Tyson Blue. Thanks to Tyson Blue, I'm able to put a non-fiction book on this list.

Tyson's um...*heartfelt devotion* to Stephen King becomes very apparent while reading this book.

- 7 *Skeletons* by Al Sarrantonio. This actually isn't on my shelf anymore since I pawned it off on Peter—but it was so bad, I had to mention it. Now, the thought of a skeleton uprising, a la JASON AND THE ARGONAUTS, is neat, but when Sarrantonio has Lenin's skeleton preaching to the proletariat in Moscow, I think he's overstepped absurdity by a few feet.
- 8 *Spook* by Steve Vance. This book manages to negate its entire set-up on the last page. A little warning would have been nice. Instead, it's a 200-page waste of time.
- 9 *Fear* by L. Ron Hubbard. Why people come out of the woodwork to praise this book is beyond me. I've read some of Hubbard's satire and enjoyed it—but I think the scientists are stretching it to call him a master of horror. Dianetics notwithstanding, of course.
- 10 *Faerie Tale* by Raymond Feist. I don't know why I expected to enjoy this fantasy-terror mix, but it didn't take too many leprechauns to make me lose interest quickly. Strictly for the 'folk-singing' crowd.

B

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EDITORS' NOTE:

The following is a *Scream Factory* EXCLUSIVE! We managed to get hold of an early work by a well-respected mid-list author (yes, you're familiar with his work). The story was sent to us by his high school English teacher (name withheld by request), who is now extremely proud of the author's work.

When we contacted the author about this important find, he requested that we not run the tale, going so far as to threaten us with legal action. When reminded of the rights of the free press, the author backed off a bit and requested only that we run the story under a pseudonym of his choosing. We're sorry that we can't run the following "masterpiece" under the author's own byline, but here's a hint: the pseudonym appears as a secondary character in the author's biggest selling genre title. In view of this issue's theme, we feel this story's appearance here is particularly appropriate. We hope you ~~can~~ enjoy it.

The Pale Light Of The Haunting Sun

BY
DANIEL BANGFARKER

*Is everything we see or seem just a dream
within a dream? - HP LOVECRAFT*

*I won't be your father figure - George
Michael*

Jack's Bar was very dark. He saw beautiful women everywhere his eyes would roam. Around the barstools, near the purple velvet pool table, even huddled indiscreetly en masse in front of the single-gender laboratory.

Sid Roberts was a vicious man. He had eyes like two spiralling amber coals. Two pyrene jet-streams of unadulterated horror. In short, a man not to be reckoned with.

He was searching for the perfect prey. That one female that would take him to the heights of incredible ecstasy...and pain.

Yes, pain, that strange emotion deep inside all humans. No, the brunette over by the bubbling multi-colored jukebox wouldn't do. The redhead with the green eyes dressed in short tight hot pink jeans was just too flashy for him. Nothing seemed to catch his perverted oracle.

That was when he saw Sally. She was a cool drink of water, with a figure like an hourglass, a face and eyes that could stop a clock. A body to be caressed, to be nurtured, to be...USED.

She didn't seem to be with anyone, so he casually strode to the edge of the bar and lit a Marlboro, tipping his Stetson up (the way they liked it). Johnny Cougar was on the jukebox singing about how it was a lonely old

night...but weren't they all? Yes, she was beautiful- a little pale though. But in the dark of a cheap hotel room in the heat of passion, who really looked up there?

"How do, ma'am?" He asked her. "Pretty good" She told him, obsequiously. "Mighty fine night out." He said, picking up his oblong ash-tray and moving down next to her where she sat. Her blond hair shimmered in the light of the bar, like all the gold in Fort Knox.

"A mighty fine night indeed," She replied to him. "Sid's my name. And you'd be..." He asked her. "Sally, Sally Wayne." She raised her hand in a friendly gesture. Sid took the hand in his hand and kissed her hand, noticing the paleness of her hand. Her skin was as cold as the night!

"Can I buy you a drink?" he asked Sally. "I never drink...liquor." She said with a thin smile, barely exposing to Sid what looked like pearly white teeth curiously thin and sharp!

Have to remember that...Sid thought to himself in his head. Careful with the teeth on the foreskin.

"You from around here? I ain't never seen your pretty self before in Jeff's Bar." Sid asked Sally, reflectively.

"Yes, I live out on the old Black Summit Highway, just south of Alabaster."

"Ah, a Baster" he said, laughing ponderously like an old sheep dog searching for his master. "Don't get many of them here in Carnival."

"What do you do in your spare time." She asked speculatively. "Well, I mostly travel on business," he said to Sally squintingly.

"Business? Are you some kind of travelling salesman? Or something?"

"Well, sorta..." Sid chuckled indecisively. A Salesman for death! he thought with an evil grin in his imagination. "I'm an insurance salesman for Pelegrinas Insurance out in Big Oak. You heard of it?"

"Sure, who hasn't she answered mildly?" Sid licked her lips. His mouth was as dry as a cotton ball.

He took a drink of his Whiskey. "Listen, Sally, why don't we... say, slam out of this rat-trap? A man like me with a woman like you. Who knows what could happen?"

"Sounds copasetic to me, Sid" She grabbed at her coat and walked out of the brightly lit shadowy cabana.

The streets were slick with the morning dew and a thin layer of ice follicles hung from the rafters of Johnny's bar like small explosive projectiles. The only light on the street was the gentle buzzing of the blue neon sign outside the bar.

"My place or yours?" Sid asked ponderously. The erection in his drawers ached to be free from its constricting barriers like a roaring lion caged up in some cheap sleazy bargain basement sideshow circus.

"Either one's alright with me" Sally said with a luscious smirk of righteous self-doubt.

They drove in his 57 Impala in total silence. "So where do you work, Sally?" Sid asked Sally precipitously. "Oh, here and there. I'm sorta a travelling salesman myself"

Sally said.

"I love the country. It's so beautiful, so spacious, so quiet and so secluded." She was really very pale, he noticed.

As they arrived, they got out of the VW and walked to her apartment door. Sid stopped and suddenly said "Oh, just a minute, I forgot something, I'll be right back."

Sid went to his trunk and removed something from the dark trunk. He closed the trunk and walked back into the house. Only to find Sally buck naked and spread-eagled on her bed like an X in some obscene tic-tac-toe game. He wasted no time in becoming nude himself and mounted her like a cheap art print, thrusting his pelvic manhood into her female succulents. She was cold, he noticed with shivering inten-

sity. Even down there.

His penis felt like a throbbing popsicle. That was when he pulled out the knife he had hidden behind his back and thrust it into her abdominal cavity.

Expecting the blood to gush, he promptly withdrew his member. Sally began to laugh with an evil cackle. He looked between his legs and indeed saw pumping crimson... Jetting from between his legs where once stood his manhood! He looked up into Sally's eyes with overcoming dread and impending fear.

"What are you?" He screeched. "Remember this girl?" She said as she pulled out a picture of a beautiful young girl in her mid-twenties she had hidden behind her back.

"This was my sister Martha. You murdered her. Now you must face my wrath. With that, Sally sunk her teeth into Sid's neck, for you see, she was one of the night's children, one of the undead... A VAMPIRE!

THE END

I'M A VAMPIRE,
AND YOU KILLED MY
SISTER!



Illustration Dedicated to Ellen D.



DEJA'S DOMICILE OF DREAD

by Tom Deja



When You Stink, You Stink

The worst horror comics of all time, no less. You know how hard it is to sift through almost a hundred years of sequential art and come up with a handful of the absolute, no-doubt, total losers of graphic literature? It ain't easy; I haven't been this unnerved since I watched a pilot on ABC called DAKOTA'S WAY a few years back.

Okay, so I exaggerate a bit. Luckily I wasn't the first worker in the vineyard of vile. Eclipse Comics reprinted Michael Gilbert's nominees for the worst comics of all time in 1987's *Mr. Monster's Hi-Shock Schlock*. I recommend picking it up, if only for "Corpses—Coast to Coast," the world's only anti-labor, Commie-bashing zombie story. It recounts how the 'United World Zombies' take over the world while some crimson-cowled skeleton (Death?) stands by, disapproving. If that's not your cup of blood, there's a typical case for 'The Eye', a near-omnipotent psychic detective who manifests himself as a giant, disembodied eye!

And then there's Flatman.

Flatman is this guy who, after a freak happenstance, is a breathing human pancake. He still retains his mobility, but being a talking tostada isn't all beer 'n skittles: his wife leaves him, and most of his friends can't stand to look at the sucker. So he robs a few banks (slipping himself under the door, natch) and marries a

gold-digging second wife. When Goldie tries to poison him, Flatman tries to steamroll her, but ends up getting crushed a second time! Some guys never learn.

Stories like this aren't just bad; they short circuit your brain with their illogic. A story like "Flatman" transcends simple awfulness to reach an Ed Wood-ian sense of nirvana. They're the Platolean idea of bad comics. I call this plateau of insanity "the brainburner". Okay, they'll put you off comics for a few weeks, but I guarantee you'll read them repeatedly. After all, a bad drama is a great comedy.

The brainburners of *Hi-Shock Schlock* came from the forties and fifties. Most of mine come from the seventies, when I first started collecting seriously. The most memorable—and longest-lasting—of these four-color foul shots was *It!* (*It!* *The Living Colossus* in its last two appearances), the lead feature of *Astonishing Tales* #21-24. This series was the brainchild of Tony Isabella, who, to be fair, had to satisfy several requirements in creating this series. The title was imposed on him by Stan Lee (an adaptation of Theodore Sturgeon's classic short story, "It", proved to be a best-seller for Marvel the preceding year). It had to feature monsters, to capitalize on the monster craze of the early seventies. Most importantly, each issue had to include at least two pages of reprinted Marvel monster material. With all these restrictions, it's amazing Isabella ever

produced anything even vaguely resembling a story.

It! was the story of special effects maven Bob O'Bryan. Bob's a paraplegic thanks to a jealous actor, and he now feels inadequate in front of his fiancée. For unknown reasons, a group of mercenaries tries to steal a hundred-foot granite statue from the studio backlot. The mercenaries shrink the statue down to thirty feet and make off with it, but not before Bob projects his consciousness *inside* the statue. Bob kicks serious butt. He learns that the mercenaries are employees of Dr. Vault, an ailing scientist who wishes to make the stone object d'art his new body and rule the world. Before Bob and the doctor tussle, he must use his rocky might to fend off an invasion of gargoyles from Stonus IV and get into a silly kung-fu fight with a giant dragon called Fin Fang Foom.

Basic stuff, eh? But *It!* was so filled to the brim with sub-plots (like the fiancée and the actor) that the actual story was in a perpetual holding pattern. In fact, Isabella was so busy creating sub-plots and situations that he forgot to make any characters to react to them. There's also the godawful art to take into account, done by Dick Ayers at the nadir of his career. His work is stiff, sketchy and ugly—uglier still when placed next to reprinted examples of Ayers at his peak. And the reprinted material requirement so constrained Isabella that the stories he came up with were old at the time of the pulps.

At the end of *Astonishing Tales* #24, Marvel announced *It!*'s imminent replacement by *Deathlok the Demolisher*. The editorial hinted that the limited run was Marvel's idea. I like to think the Board of Directors saw a few installments of *It!* and chose the honorable way out.

That's what Martin Goodman and Larry Lieber (Stan Lee's brother) did with the entire Atlas line in the mid-70s. They panicked and retooled all of their books first, which was a shame: in their year of existence, this company produced some truly interesting work by some of the best writers and artists of the time. It's a sad fact that the last month or so of its tenure turned Atlas into nothing more than a footnote.

It's also a sad fact that they let Michael

Fleischer create *The Brute* and *The Tarantula*.

On paper, the idea of Fleischer doing horror books for Atlas was a sound one; at the time he was extremely hot thanks to his work on *The Spectre*. His first concept, *The Grim Ghost*, was actually quite good. Unfortunately, his propensity for cannibal heroes was allowed to flower under Atlas—he created three of them—and the two aforementioned titles were among them. Together, they rank among the worst comics of all time, let alone the worst horror comics.

The Brute was a revisionist *Hulk*, concerning a Neanderthal man thawed out by a nuclear power plant. After chowing down on a pair of boys, the Brute is captured and placed in the care of a sexy anthropologist. Over the next three issues, the Brute romped and stomped all over anybody that stood in his path, including lame villains like Doctor Speer and his Lizard Men. The art, by DC standby Mike Sekowsky, was fine—but woefully out of place, as Sekowsky's cartoony, ungraceful figures elicited laughs and not horror. The combination of goony figure work and nauseating storylines assure *The Brute* a permanent place in this pantheon of the putrid.

But *The Brute* was *The Shining* next to *The Tarantula*. The lead feature of *Weird Suspense*, Count Eugene Lycosa was descended from a race of extraterrestrial spiders (!). This gave him the head and hands of an arachnid, as well as a compulsion to ensnare evildoers, web them up, and eat them raw. Pat Boyette did some excellent artwork for the series, which just emphasized the inherent sick nature of the concept. The plotting and bleak sense of humor that made *The Grim Ghost* so appealing disappears here, to be replaced by endless scenes of mobsters becoming Lycosa-Chow.

For the third installment of both *The Brute* and *The Tarantula*, Gary Freidrich tried to make sense of these bizarre concepts, but it didn't help much. The entire Atlas line went under before either book saw its fourth issue.

So far I've concentrated on series concepts doomed from the start. That doesn't mean that successful characters don't get stuck in awful stories. Take *Deadman*, for instance. An aerialist sent back to locate his killer by possessing the bodies of others. *Deadman* is a fan favorite who's been screwed over countless times.

There were the issues of *Forever People* where Jack Kirby had Deadman tied in to his 'New Gods' continuum by making his killer a servant of Darkseid. Then there was that extended stint in *Challengers of the Unknown*, where Gerry Conway and Keith Giffen (doing his worst art, a bad Kirby knock-off emphasizing black inks) had him possess the body of Swamp Thing so he could help the Challengers and Rip Hunter defeat evil vegetables.

But after some deliberation, the worst use of Deadman was "The Section Chief", a serial by Mike Baron and Dan Jurgens for *Action Comics Weekly*. This eight-part abortion of a series took Deadman to hell and back. You see, our hero investigates the appearance of a Mayan war god at a modern archaeological site and ends up being captured by an ambitious female C.I.A. agent. He's shipped to Langley, where they've imprisoned Satan in a jar. Deadman unwittingly releases Ol' Scratch, and the two engage in a body-switching duel (among the people they fight as are Raisa Gorbachev and Nancy Reagan). Deadman sort of wins, and finds out that this Satan is nothing more than an alien with delusions of adequacy. So's the Mayan war god, and the two return to the stars. End of story.

At least they called it a story. Baron, otherwise an exceptional writer, submitted an awful story lacking in logic, linear movement, or imagination. He also indulged himself in flights of unfunny humor, resulting in a Satan who quotes the Stones and asks if Deadman plays pinocchio. Other elements, like D.B. Cooper and

a 10,000 Maniacs song, are thrown in for no readily apparent reason.

If Baron buried Deadman, Dan Jurgens put the final nails in his coffin. An uninteresting penciller to begin with, Jurgens' artwork is so mediocre it's painful to look at. It's without nasty shocks, gruesome chills or vibrant lay-

outs. In Jurgens' hands, "The Section Chief" also features one of the most unscary Hells I've ever seen. This is the kind of horror story Tipper Gore would produce if asked to make a comic book.

But this story does have a happy ending: Baron's next Deadman serial was a shuddery voodoo tale pencilled by Kelley Jones. The two were reunited on *Love and Death*, one of the finest Deadman tales ever produced. But that's another story.

Okay, I know what you're thinking. It's easy to pick on a bunch of forgotten series and failed experiments. To pick on a current series takes guts. To prove I'm not chicken, I've chosen two comics on the newsstands now so devoted to carnage over content that basic storytelling goes out the window. One of them is a fan favorite, yet still ranks as one of the



Which is worse: the dull, boring Satan; the dull, boring depiction of Hell; or the fact that the artist had to spell it all out for you in the bottom panel? (from *Action Comics Weekly* #606)

worst horror comics of all time.

(Deja dives for cover as he prepares for the backlash from slugging...)

Ghost Rider (Marvel; \$1.75) is the revival of a weird but oddly appealing book brought forth by the monster craze of the seventies. It's the story of Danny Ketch, a citizen of my old nabe, Cypress Hills. After being caught in the crossfire between two criminal factions, his sister is seriously wounded. Ketch comes across

an old motorcycle that 'happens' to be lying in the middle of a cemetery. By touching the bike's gas cap, he becomes the Ghost Rider, a "Spirit of Vengeance." This leather-jacketed skeleton is devoted to making the spillers of innocent blood suffer—among them the Inhuman Deathwatch, the psychopathic Zodiac, and a suave albino with fangs called Blackout (who kills Ketch's sister, by the way).

Why do I hate *Ghost Rider* so much? The lack of strong plotting has something to do with it, as the stories seem to be little more than excuses to introduce the Spirit to the per-
vie of the month. A stronger reason for me might be Howard Mackie's scripts, which revel in torture and mayhem while hypocritically reminding us at every juncture that Ghost Rider "never killed anyone, never hurt anyone who didn't deserve—(it)." There's also the fact that the book is humorless and lacking in anything but the basest of human emotions.

(Hey, all the best horror writers acknowledge the existence of more complex emotions than hate. Don't blame me for hating that in my comics, too.)

But these transgressions aren't fatal; H.P. Lovecraft never cared about coherent plotting, either. What makes *Ghost Rider* so repellent is the total lack of personality displayed by the entire cast. Just look at the recently-reprinted first seven issues: everyone from family member to thug, policeman to bum, is soulless. Even guest stars and borrowed villains like *The Punisher* or *Captain America's Flag Smasher* has their uniqueness leeched out of them. With nothing but cardboard for characters, *Ghost Rider* becomes nothing more than a paper atrocity exhibition. Of all the issues I've read, only one character is interesting—the aforementioned Blackout. With his obsession with his look and too-polite veneer, this recur-

ring menace really made an impression on me. Of course, he was written out (but not killed...remember, the Ghost Rider doesn't take human life), so there's no reason for me to continue reading.

Then there's *Klownshock* (Northstar; \$2.75). Like *Ghost Rider*, the title character is a grotesque creature who rides a motorcycle. Like *Ghost Rider*, it is plotless. Unlike *Ghost Rider*, this book has no qualms about a hero who kills. Just listen to the editorial's subdued and tasteful description of the book's strong points:

"If a human scalping while the victim is still alive isn't enough, just check out the impaling on page six! Still not enough sickness for your diseased mind? Only Northstar would dare to show you the terror and the anguish of child molestation on page fifteen."

Uh, yeah.

This book not only doesn't have *Ghost Rider's* tenuous shadow of a plot, they're proud of it. There's a six page fight scene, a discussion of Aztec sacrificial rites, a bald-faced plug for another Northstar book, that exceptionally tasteless child molestation scene the publishers are so proud of ("How about making room for Daddy?" asks the badly-drawn molester), and an eight page sequence that inexplicably takes place during Columbus' voyage to America. No attempt is made to connect these scenes together into a coherent story. Stephen Lau's prose is self-conscious ("It is better that they think I am afflicted with acne than they should know the true curse of my evil disposition."), self-congratulatory ("That Leatherface-Man is a totally righteous dude."), and awkward ("The chainsaw and human-skin for faces are totally



gnarly.") Former Tim Vigil inker Tim Tyler displays a severe lack of training in basic anatomy, managing to make Dan Jurgens look great in comparison. There's another story in here, a plotless piece of work carried by its Seinkelwicz knock-off art. Northstar promised a second issue of *Klownshock* for February. I've yet to see it, and that suits me fine.

As I look at the parade of putritude I've presented, I notice a unifying theme. All of these comics believed a concept (a giant statue with a man's brain; a guy squashed flat who robs banks; a fan favorite discovers Satan imprisoned in Langley) would so enthrall readers that all the essentials of a good comic—characterization, plot, style—could be forgotten. But high concepts are nothing but words on paper unless worked on with care (just ask James Cameron), and most of these stories are consigned to the places of mercifully forgotten memories. The only exception is *Ghost Rider*, which proves that violence will sell even the stupidest books.

But enough sentimentality. Thanks to Guy Glumento, who provided me with the *Astonishing Tales*; the folks at Mike's Comics and Cards for the Atlas comics; Dorian Tenore-Bartilucci for checking spelling and grammar; Rob at the Comics Zone, who wanted to see "Spragg, the Living Mountain" mentioned once; and Carl Douglas, for writing the greatest song ever written (Kai!).

Please remember that I actively encourage comments and suggestions at the Domicile. Just write me at 55-35 Myrtle Avenue, Top Floor, Ridgewood, NY, 11385. I can't guarantee a personal reply, but I don't rule it out—especially if you send me some Winona Ryder memorabilia with your letter.

Next time we'll be looking at how a historian took a Golden Age hero and fused him with the most notorious comics of the fifties to produce the most terrifying figure of the seventies. Irish Coffee will be served as you meet Jim Corrigan, AKA The Spectre. Until then, remember: the question is not whether the glass is half-full or half-empty, but who drank out of it before you. Later.

B

Book Review

Dark Matter

by Garfield Reeves-Stevens

Doubleday, 1990, \$18.95

★ ★ ★ 1/2

Reviewed by Bob Morrish

Canadian author Garfield Reeves-Stevens has quietly honed his skills over the past few years with novels such as *Blood Shift* and *Nighteyes*. Now, with *Dark Matter*, the author has delivered a tour-de-force which should move him into the upper echelon of horror and thriller writers.

The style of this novel recalls both Dean Koontz, for its deft characterizations and skillful mixing of genres, as well as Thomas Harris, for its mounting suspense and occasional glimpses inside a psychopath's mind. The story is set in the mid-1990s and centers around a Nobel-Prize-winning quantum physicist named Anthony Cross. The brilliant, eccentric Cross has a complete entourage surrounding him, including a co-worker, Charis Neale, who doubles as his lover and confidante, two other co-workers who mostly act as sounding boards for Cross's ideas, and a corporate financial sponsor that is supposedly only interested in Dr. Cross's work to the extent that they can use it for a charitable tax write-off.

The intrigue blossoms when a workaholic Los Angeles detective named Kate Duvall deduces that several murders are somehow connected to Cross's research team. Contrasted with the sheer brilliance of Cross's mind, Duvall's plodding thoroughness and surprising insights are quirky, fascinating, and somehow reminiscent of television's Detective Columbo. As the true nature, and potential world-shaking impact, of the research team's experiments become apparent, the plot reaches full speed.

Throughout the book, suspenseful and action-packed sequences are intermingled with lengthy discourses on quantum physics. That Reeves-Stevens manages to do this without breaking the mood or disrupting the flow of the story is a testament to his skills. Read *Dark Matter* and you'll see an exciting new author hitting his stride.

Early Bird Preview: Stephen King's *Dolores Claiborne*

Dolores Claiborne

November, 1992; Viking. 303 pages

Reviewed by John Scieri

For the first time in several years, readers are being treated to not one, but two major hardcover Stephen King releases in a twelve-month period. For King fanatics, the only negative factor present is that with *Dolores Claiborne*, Stephen King has fulfilled his record-setting contract of four years ago, and no new deal has yet been announced.

Rather than worry about what we may not be getting from King in the next few years, let's take a look at what we are getting. *Dolores Claiborne* is a true departure for King. While the characters are just as rich and interesting as they've always been, this book lacks that staple "Stephen King style" of horror.

Instead, *Dolores Claiborne* often reminded me of what I'd call (for lack of a better term) a novel of "Toni Morrison style" horror. Now, if you've never read Toni Morrison, her style isn't the easiest thing to describe, but if you have, I'm sure you'll know what I mean. The horrors in this book do involve murder and abuse, but certainly do not involve killer cars, dopplegangers, or any other element of supernatural horror.

So what does this all mean? If you strip the Stephen King style of horror out of a Stephen King novel, what do you get? A book that will finally appeal to a literary audience? Perhaps, but I found it interesting that the cover of this novel (or rather this galley) was abnormally lacking in plot synopsis. In fact, it said nothing other than "Stephen King's next bestseller." Upon reflection, I think that was a wise decision on the part of Viking. Had they said, "Stephen King, in a departure from his roots in horror...", I'm sure you could guess how each and every review would start. At least this way, the novel has a chance to succeed on its own

merits, which I feel it does.

Several things about the book come as interesting surprises. First off is its thematic links to King's last novel, *Gerald's Game*. Also interesting is the fact that the novel is made up solely of a first person narrative. No chapter breaks for all you late-night readers to close this one before you're finished. One must question whether or not the author can sustain such a narrative task. In *Gerald's Game*—a book of similar length—King faltered in the first hundred pages. Fortunately, such is not the case with *Dolores Claiborne*.

So, what is it about? That's probably the most important thing to most of you. The title character of *Dolores Claiborne* is a foul-mouthed and often foul tempered woman who goes to the police to discuss the mysterious death of her employer, whom she had taken care of for the past several years. In the process, Dolores finally reveals the truth about what happened to her husband on the night of a certain eclipse, many years ago (yes, the same eclipse from *Gerald's Game*).

King handles all of the characters well, but there is something about Dolores' employer, Vera Donovan, that makes her the most captivating persona in

the book. Also worth noting is Dolores' late husband Joe St. George, who's disturbingly believable. Again King gives his characters a reality that is often unmatched in contemporary fiction.

As I said earlier, this book seems to be treading closer to Toni Morrison territory than *Castle Rock*, but I think it's a welcome relief from a writer who's given us more than our share of trips to the dark side of supernatural horror. If you pick this book up expecting the same old thing, you'll be disappointed; if you're willing to try something a little different, you may be in for a pleasant surprise.





the HORROR PULPIT

by Stefan Dziemianowicz

Let's be honest:

Some of the worst horror fiction ever published appeared in the pulps. The total volume of truly bad horror in the pulps is hard to gauge, but were one to calculate it on a percentage basis—I'd wager that it amounts to about as much as is being written today.

This is not a nostalgia buff's defense of his guilty pleasures, so much as a request for some perspective. A lot of readers of horror fiction today seem to hold the opinion that nothing good came out of the pulps, and generally support their claims by holding up a mediocre story from *Weird Tales* (or one of its less distinguished competitors) as an example. The problem with such a test is that it measures pulp stories against the best the horror genre has to offer, instead of considering them in the context of what was being written at the time. There's nothing wrong with looking to masters like Poe, Blackwood, and Lovecraft (whom, you may recall, was a pulp writer) as paragons of the genre, but were we to eliminate from our estimations every writer who doesn't measure up to the standards they set, horror would be an extremely barren and unrewarding genre.

When distinguishing the best and worst fiction to appear in the horror pulps, one has to be ever mindful of the author, the market, and the audience that played a role in the creation of that fiction. The fact is, most pulp writers

wrote stories that delivered the requisite thrills and chills readers expected of them. If those stories don't appeal as much today, that says more about how the orientation of the weird fiction genre has shifted over the decades than it does about a previous generation's tastes. Thus, a caveat: I suspect that some of the stories I am about to describe were fondly cherished when they first appeared in print, and I wouldn't want to be put in the position of having to measure them against contemporary weird fiction, any more than I would want to have to defend weird fiction of today against what will be produced 30 years from now. "Worst"—and I cannot emphasize this too much—is strictly in the eye of the beholder.

There is no better example of why one has to proceed cautiously when defining the "worst" of pulp horror than the shudder pulps, that line of 15 or so weird menace magazines published between the mid '30s and '40s and epitomized by field leaders *Horror Stories* and *Terror Tales*. Their titles notwithstanding, these magazines offered little that would have interested devotees of even the worst supernatural horror fiction. Shudder pulp stories were, almost without exception, conjured from the same simple formula: A hero and his wholesome young girlfriend are imperiled (either alone or in a group) by a weird threat (usually one that implies the defilement or death of the girlfriend) which seems so outra-

geously impossible that a supernatural agent is presumed to be at work. At the conclusion, though, everything is explained (usually in several pages of breathless exposition) to have been engineered by an evil fanatic—often a mad scientist or deranged community leader who keeps an army of lackeys and lunatics at his beck and call. These stories delivered little in the way of plausible plotting but as much torture, degradation, and purple prose as could be crammed into story lengths ranging from 5,000 ("Short Stories of Eerie Menace") to 15,000 ("Full-Length Mystery Horror Novel") words.

For all the faults of shudder pulp fiction, the elaborate rationales authors concocted to keep the plots from slipping off completely into the inexplicable showed a certain amount of imagination. And therein lies the irony of shudder pulp fiction: the "worse" the story (i.e. the more preposterous the weird menace), the more successful it was as shudder pulp fare. Just about every menace imaginable was entertained in the shudder pulps (many of which I'll discuss in my next column), but the two "worst" appear in what are probably the two best known shudder pulp stories: Donald Graham's "Revelry in Hell," from the April/May 1939 *Uncanny Stories*, about a white slaver who commands an army of circus freaks to abduct the female students of a nearby finishing school for prizes in a "carnival of passion and pain" staged for rich aphrodisiac-intoxicated codgers from the local nursing home; and Frederick Davis's immortal "The Mole Men Want Your Eyes," from the April/May 1938 *Horror Stories*, in which a crazed ophthalmologist and a theoretical criminologist team up with a band of sexual deviants who have been trapped for years in an abandoned mine to pull a hoax on the citizens of the nearby town.

Admittedly, the shudder pulps were an exception: their stories, no matter how dramatically rendered, were not meant to be taken seriously, and so have to be judged by a completely different set of standards than those applied to the real weird fiction pulps: *Weird Tales*, *Strange Tales*, *Strange Stories*, *Unknown Worlds*, and the host of other magazines that constitute the pulp weird fiction legacy.

In its first incarnation, *Weird Tales* published 279 issues and thus about 4,000 stories. According to Sturgeon's law, that means some 3,800 of those stories (i.e., 95%) were crap. Were I to demonstrate extreme generosity of taste and submit that only 10% of those stories were really bad, it would still be impossible to describe more than a handful of the worst in the space allotted here.

It is generally agreed that the worst issues of *Weird Tales* were the first 12, edited by Edwin Baird, and Baird certainly published the all-time worst story ever to appear in "The Unique Magazine," Isa-Belle Manzer's "The Transparent Ghost." Baird published the story as a joke, in three mercifully brief parts beginning in February 1924, following the mockingly enthusiastic response of readers to Manzer's illiterate cover letter reproduced in "The Eyrie" (the *Weird Tales* letters column). The following typo-free (honest!) excerpt from this incoherent tale of a scientist who invents a means of rendering himself invisible gives you an idea of the nadir to which *Weird Tales* fiction was capable of sinking: 1

The next afternoon Doctor, Daily inhaled some more of the liquid Filiarto Transparent gas, to make him invisible! for he had discovered that he was coming back in his natrel body agsin and he had found out that the Transparent Gas would only make him invisible for three days untill he would begin to turn back to his natrel self again and if he wanted to play ghost it was necessary for him to take more of the gas, he had decided to take a long walk On all sides the desert stretched away to the haze of nothingness -aland of the marage; scens which the jealous desert steals from the arid land s and hold up to the eyes of desert men to lure them on...

To my knowledge, no one has ever pointed out that the April 1924 issue in which this wretched serial concluded was (coincidentally?) Baird's last as editor.

Farnsworth Wright, who took over *Weird Tales* with the November 1924 issue, was a much better editor than Baird, and is credited with having brought to *Weird Tales* the vision that shaped the magazine as we know it today. But he erred badly by reprinting a Baird selection from the May and June 1923 issues, A.G. Birch's "The Moon Terror," as the title story for a hardcover collection of weird scientific tales

from the magazine in 1927. Thus, Birch's only contribution to the magazine was a silly yellow-peril story in which fanatical Chinese scientists attempt to create a second moon by leveraging a huge chunk of the planet into space through a series of devastating earthquakes. Proclaims the one western scientist in a position to inform his colleagues of exactly what is happening, "I am asking you to deal with modern facts—to grapple with scientific ideas that are so far ahead of our times the world is not prepared to accept them!" Indeed, as late as 1943, it seemed readers were still incapable of grappling with the scientific concept behind the story's menace—a giant electrically-driven jackhammer repeatedly striking the planet at its resonance frequency—for *The Moon Terror* collection was still being given away by the magazine as a subscription freebie.

The yellow-peril story was one of several popular weird fiction types *Weird Tales* published to excess while trying to establish its identity in the 1920s. Most were pretty dreadful, but the form hit rock bottom in Howard Marsh's "The Foot Fetish," the cover story of the June 1926 issue. In this one, an American woman is nearly shanghaied to Shanghai by fanatical foot fetishists when they discover that her foot bears a birthmark similar in design to a symbol on their sacred totem. The scene in which the hero identifies the heroine's abductors on the Shanghai-bound ship—by floating a replica of the foot totem over a crowded room to see who bows in obelance—has to be read to be believed.

Another favorite *Weird Tales* story type was the lost or primitive race tale. C.M. Eddy (of "The Loved Dead" fame) published two stories of Stone Age lovers, "With Weapons of Stone" (12/24) and "Arl of the Caves" (1/25), that were notable for their banal rendering of primi-

tive dialogue. But even these were topped by four lost-race stories of Arthur Thatcher, including his two two-part serials "The Valley of Teeheemen" (12/24-1/25) and "The Last of the Teeheemen" (3-4/25), in which American adventurers find themselves marooned in a lost valley full of dinosaurs (the titular "teeheemen") and other perils. The best these stories had to offer were stereotypical natives in loincloths running around and screaming unfamiliar native names for familiar jungle animals, plus a few observations like the following,

from the lips of an American who remains grammatically correct while excitedly watching a woman menaced by a saber-tooth tiger:

"An enormous Tiger!...It has just dropped its victim who is feigning dead!"

By far, the most popular story type in early issues of *Weird Tales* was the weird scientific tale. Although weird scientific tales tended to emphasize the weird over the scientific, the worst, of which there were many, failed to convey a sense of either. R. Anthony's "The Endocrine Monster" (4/27) opened with a super-guinea pig (no doubt a first in weird fiction annals) bending the bars of its laboratory cage, and ended with an excerpt from a medical textbook detailing the complications of overdeveloped adrenal glands to explain how its South American heroine was capable of crushing men to death through the power of her embrace. In contrast Joel Martin Nichols, in "The Devil Ray" (5-6/26), put more science into his smiles—

"Just as a delicately regulated pump begins working automatically when the water reaches a certain level, so the hair-trigger instincts of the American telegraphed to every nerve center of his body that another step toward that recumbent figure would mean his end"

—than into his plot about vengeful postwar Germans out to avenge the fatherland by

Weird Tales



by Curtis C. Seal (© *Weird Tales* Ltd., 1927)

means of a death ray. And no weird science discussion would be complete without mention of W. Elwyn Backus's three-part opus, "Behind the Moon" (12/29-2/30), in which a group of fun-loving young adults take a joyride to the moon in a homemade rocket, discover a race of fungoid creatures living on the bright side who need human female blood for breeding purposes, and encounter crabmonsters on the dark side. Speculations like the following, as two space voyagers prepare to step outside their spacecraft for the first time—

"Would the lunar atmosphere prove to be an utter vacuum, causing the natural pressure within their bodies to explode their very flesh into puffed monstrosities?"

—are, alas, defused of their potential for suspense once it is discovered the moon has a perfectly breathable atmosphere (you mean you didn't know that?).

An interesting sub-genre of the weird scientific tale was the fake weird science story, in which the wondrous machinations of new scientific breakthroughs are eventually exposed as a hoax. The winner for most contrived scenario in such fiction is Ralph Parker Anderson's "The Purple Light" (11/24), in which an obsessed inventor revenges himself on his best friend—who is also his rival in love (the downfall of many a weird scientist in the pulps)—via his purple death ray. In an elaborate scheme, the inventor shows the friend evidence of the ray's potency—the ashes of a disintegrated cat, a fused mass of 12 silver dollars, a severe burn on his arm caused by carelessness in the laboratory—before a final demonstration in which he uses the beam to blow a rock off a mountaintop. When he then threatens to turn the ray on his friend, the man dies of fright—whereupon the inventor, smitten with a guilty conscience, launches into a post-mortem confession that would have had the shudder pulp writers purple with envy:

"I never had any purple light machine! I just took some ashes from the fire and told you they had been a cat. I melted some metal in a hot furnace and told you the purple light had done it. I had my servant dynamite the rock at the right minute. I burned my arm with a sun glass!"

But the honor for worst weird science

writer in *Weird Tales* goes to Bassett Morgan. Morgan was actually a competent writer who managed to inject a modicum of wit into her stories, but she had an almost pathological liking for one theme in particular: brain transplants. Of 13 stories she wrote for *Weird Tales* between 1926 and 1936, 10 employed this idea. Though her brain donors were always humans, she at least varied her recipients: a sea monster in "Laocoon" (7/26), a Papuan native chief in "The Head" (2/27), apes and orangutans in "Gray Ghouls" (7/27), "The Devils of Po Sung" (12/27), "Demon Doom of N'Yeng Sen" (8/29), "Island of Doom" (3/32), and "Black Bagheela" (1/35), and jungle cats in "Tiger Dust" (4/33). Naturally, these hybrid creatures retain the power of speech so that they can tell unsuspecting protagonists the ghastly fate that has befallen them—almost always in cockney or American street slang.

By the 1930s, Wright's editorial acumen had turned *Weird Tales* into a formidable weird fiction pulp. With Lovecraft, Howard, Smith, Quinn, Moore, Bloch, Whitehead, Wandrel, and other reliables dominating the magazine, one was guaranteed pretty good reading just about every month. Except for the serials...

If one needed any proof that the weird tale works best in short form, one had only to look at the multi-installment short novels Wright ran (often in overlapping sequence) throughout the '30s to keep readers coming back for more. For every memorable serial by Robert E. Howard, Jack Williamson, or Otis Adelbert Kline, readers had to endure fodder like Paul Ernst's five-part "The Black Monarch" (2-6/30). This splice of the lost race and weird menace genre tells of an immortal megalomaniac (whose brain has so expanded through the accumulation of centuries of wisdom that he has had his skull replaced by a huge black metal helmet) who schemes to take over the world by starting a 20-year war between the United States and China that will devastate the surface of the earth, and then poisoning the planet's water supply with a drug that will reduce the survivors to easily manipulated zombies (leading one to wonder what the point of taking over such a world would be). The best that can

be said of this story is that it was immediately beaten out for silliest-story-of-1930 honors by Lon Dexter's three-part "Earthworms of Karma" (7-9/30), in which travelers to Mars discover that Martians are simply reincarnations of Earthlings who lived about a century ago (successive incarnations migrate to planets progressively further away from Earth) and that the planet's top scientist is adept at transplanting the brains of human beings into Martian animals (obviously a devout reader of Bassett Morgan stories).

British writer Arlton Eadie contributed two serials to *Weird Tales* in the 1930s, the longest of which (and at 60,000 words one of the longest ever to appear in the magazine), "The Trail of the Cloven Hoof" (7/34-1/35), can lay claim to one of the worst plots to appear in the magazine. The first two installments built up a moderately interesting melodrama about a legendary menace of the English moors, known as "The Terror of the Moors," which leaves a trademark cloven hoofprint after its attacks. But the story quickly turned into a ridiculous weird science thriller when it was revealed in short order that 1) the Terror's latest victim is a chemist who has invented a gas that can transform the organic elements of a human being into an explosive device, 2) the Terror is an amputee victim of an experiment with this gas whose trunk has been surgically attached to the body of a stag, and 3) the surgeon who performed this feat is a crazed German who will stop at nothing to steal the formula for the benefit of the fatherland.

Bad as Eadie's novel was, it couldn't touch two short novels from Arthur William Bernal. His four-part "Satan in Exile" (6-9/35), about an intergalactic Robin Hood bent on avenging an injustice, fell into the crevice between space opera and hero pulp fiction, a crevice from which book publishers have thankfully never

rescued it. Worse still was his three-part serial "Vampires of the Moon," perhaps the only story in the magazine's history to allude to W. Elwyn Backus's "Behind the Moon" to support the idea of a breathable lunar atmosphere. Bernal's lunarians are thought-vampires who drain their victims of conscious will and offer carefully reasoned arguments like the following to coerce the sole Earthling capable of resisting them:

"Remember that whether you help us or not, your world is doomed. Your helping us will only speed up matters a little, and for this small saving of time—for we are impatient now, having waited for this opportunity for thousands of years—we shall reward you very richly."



THE PLACE WITH MANY WINDOWS... A. V. HARRISON
by Matt Fox (© Weird Tales Ltd., 1947)

Vampires were also the subject of "Another Dracula?" (9-10/30), a two-part serial by science fiction emeritus Ralph Milne Faurey (who also contributed some of the worst short fiction to appear in *Weird Tales*). This story lifted entire paragraphs from Bram Stoker's classic novel to tell of Count Larousse, a foreigner who arrives in Yankton, Pennsylvania in possession of a coffin, who claims a rare skin disease prevents him from appearing in the daylight, and who has a hypnotic effect on the town's women—and yet insists to the town's wary citizens that he is not a vampire. The joke is that Larousse really *isn't* a vampire, merely a victim of superstitious persecution. But then what can you expect in a town where the leading doctor—when visited by the spectre of a girlfriend who supposedly died of anemia but who claims to have really just lapsed into a cataleptic state—reasons,

"He remembered, from his recent extensive reading, that anemia often results in either catalepsy or insanity, so why not both?"

A good many shorter works in *Weird Tales* qualified as some of the worst weird fiction of the 1930s, and unfortunately many of them were awarded the cover illustration, presumably because they involved a love interest for which the nimble Margaret Brundage could produce a provocative color painting. John Scott Douglas's "The Blue Woman" (9/35), for example, which told of a woman poisoned by luminous paint while working in a watch factory who turns into a glow-in-the-dark avenging fury, garnered a cover of a skinny-dipping female that was censored in Canada. Forbes Parkhill's "Coils of the Silver Serpent" (2/35) and Ronal Kayser's "The Albino Deaths" (3/35) were essentially watered-down weird menace tales, the first about a zoologist turned thief who never breaks and enters without packing his 30-foot pet anaconda (shown coiled sinuously about a maiden on the cover), and the second about a third-world dictator who maintains a medieval torture chamber beneath his fortress (which inspired a cover of a hooded figure threatening a nude heroine with a whip). John R. Speer, alone and with the help of Carlyle Schmitzler, was responsible for two turgid soap operas that were awarded (respectively) Finlay and Brundage covers: "Symphony of the Damned" (4/37), in which a composer sells his soul to the devil out of his obsession for a woman, and "The Carnal God" (6/37), about a god on the farthest planet in the solar system who enslaves Earth women as his mistresses.

But lest you think Wright had completely lost his mind in giving such stories the prominence they enjoyed, two of the worst short stories to appear in *Weird Tales* in the '30s were thankfully buried toward the back of their issues. Granville S. Hoss's "The Frog" (6/30) tells of a scientist who boosts the intelligence of a bullfrog, which then develops such an antipathy for him that it stuffs itself down his throat while he sleeps, killing them both. And in Loretta Burroughs' "The Snowman" (12/38), a woman who has hidden her murdered husband's body in any icy crevice finds that he has returned in the form of an avenging snowman—replete with corncob pipe! More amusing than this image of Frosty the Snowman with an attitude is the response of the woman's second

husband upon her confession of her crime: "Poor Nancy!...That is a terrible thing to have carried alone for a year."

Dorothy McIlwraith has been unfairly accused of undermining the quality of *Weird Tales* when she took over the magazine from Wright in May of 1940, and many people mark its death throes with her tenure. What such criticisms amount to are disappointment that McIlwraith never quite mustered a lineup of distinguished regulars like Wright had assembled. In all fairness, McIlwraith possessed—in Robert Bloch, Ray Bradbury, Manly Wade Wellman, August Derleth, Alison V. Harding, Harold Lawlor, and Mary Elizabeth Counselman—a good enough staff of regular writers that the percentage of bad stories was no worse between 1940 and 1954 than it was between 1924 and 1940.

McIlwraith all but abolished serials in the new bi-monthly magazine but H. Bedford-Jones (whom she probably coaxed over from the other magazine she was editing at the time, *Short Stories*) managed to duplicate some of the problems that *Weird Tales* serials in the '30s had shown with his "Adventure of a Professional Corpse" saga. The four stories published in this series between July 1940 and March 1941 told of a man who develops the ability to simulate death and hires himself out to people in need of a corpse—in two stories to women who need a legal husband for only a short duration, and in another to a happy-go-lucky gangster who needs a murder victim to impress his wife. All four stretched the definition of "weird fiction" to the breaking point.

Most of the stories by McIlwraith's less distinguished writers were innocuous entertainments, with only a handful being truly bad. Surprisingly, some of those came from better known writers. Ralph Milne Farley's "Test Tube Twin" (1/41) boasted one of the most ridiculous revenge scenarios ever devised: a gangster who forces a doctor to clone him so that he can kill his clone in the presence of his worst enemy's girlfriend and pin the rap on her. Arthur J. Burks, who wrote excellent fiction for *Weird Tales* in the '20s and '30s before dropping out of sight for a few years, made a very lame comeback with stories that reflect how unobservant he was of the changes that

had transformed weird fiction and science fiction in the intervening years: "The Wizard of Bird-in-Hand" (3/49) told of a teenager who uses his chemistry set to teleport himself to Brazil and communicates back to parents by means of telepathic commands to their typewriter, while "The Inner Man" (5/49) covered the exploits of a survivor of Atlantis who comes to the postwar world to teach men how to live in peace. Two new writers, however, turned in equally dreadful stories, proving that there was nothing the old talent could do for *Weird Tales* that the new talent couldn't match: In "Camel Vengeance" (9/51), the first of seven stories he contributed to the magazine, Garnet Radcliffe told of an English expatriate in Arabia who makes a name for herself by performing amusing impersonations of camels, and the vengeance wreaked on her when a camel spirits her away one evening to the camel's graveyard on the other side of the dunes; and in his sole contribution to the magazine "Once There Was an Elephant" (5/46), R. H. Phelps chronicled a love triangle between a female equestrian, a circus elephant trainer, and the elephant who shows an unhealthy obsession with the trainer, warning the reader well in advance of the climax that "Strange things happen when a man and a beast live together by day and by night for a decade." (Editors note: *Sounds like our kind of story*)

Weird Tales' one true competitor, *Strange Tales*, only published seven issues, averaging about eight stories per issue between 1931 and 1933, and thus really had neither the time nor space to amass a legacy of bad fiction. In several of its lesser stories, however, one finds laughably hasty attempts to sustain the reader's willing suspension of disbelief. In Douglas M. Dold's "The Thirteenth Floor" (11/31), for example, a woman contemplating suicide is visited by the

ghost of her uncle, who coerces her into going to the 13th floor of the Belton Hotel, where the spirits of suicides are forced to re-enact their deaths on a regular basis. No explanation is given for why the Belton should become such a spirit magnet, but at least the heroine's lack of incredulity at her uncle's appearance is rationalized:

"Though the conversation with the dead man had been a thing unparalleled in her experience, she felt no fear. Now that she herself was so close to death, it seemed but natural that she should speak with the dead."

Similarly, in Gilbert Draper's "The Feline Phantom" (3/32), a man is less than skeptical when a cat merchant sells him a specimen supposedly inhabited by the soul of its former owner because

"By a strange coincidence, I had been perusing an excellent book on metaphysics by a learned German scholar, who had devoted several chapters to phenomena similar to that recounted by the cat merchant."

Probably the worst *Strange Tales* story appeared in the next-to-the-last issue. Frank Belknap Long's "In the Lair of the Space Monsters" (1/33) tells of men in a sinking submarine who awaken from unconsciousness to find themselves captives of a spider-like race planning to feed them to their young. Pondering the fate of earlier captives, the protagonist concludes

"For hundreds of years, perhaps, they had been descending in ships into an alien world through a vent at the bottom of the ocean, which yawned to receive the living and the dead. No other explanation was tenable."

That is, of course, until the creatures' behavior proves so outrageous that the men evolve an equally outrageous theory to explain it: they have actually passed momentarily into



by Curtis C. Sewell (© Weird Tales vol. 1, 1927)

another dimension contingent upon their own. "It's much less hard to believe than that we fell through a hole in the bottom of the sea" concludes one survivor. At this point in the story, he's right.

Whereas *Strange Tales* was perceived as a staunch competitor of *Weird Tales* that published fine work by some of that magazine's better writers, *Strange Stories* was perceived as a sort of refugee camp for *Weird Tales* rejects. It's true that many *Weird Tales* writers contributed below-par work to *Strange Stories*, often under pseudonyms (not out of shame, but rather because they usually had more than one story in an issue), but the real reason for the low caliber of the fiction was the editorial policy, in place for 9 of its 13 issues, of cramming 13 stories (plus columns, advertisements, and letters) into 130 pages or less. Under the circumstances, it's a wonder that more truly wretched stories didn't appear in the magazine.

Strange Stories deserves the criticism of worst editorial oversight for any weird fiction pulp, as was evident from the repetitive themes of its stories. Robert Bloch's "The Unheavenly Twin" (6/39) and Carson Judson's "Satan's Sideshow" (8/40) both dealt with siamese twins, one of whom murders the other. The June 1939 issue could have been subtitled "The Disembodied Head" issue, it carried three stories by August Derleth, A. Hyatt Verrill, and Keith Hammond (a.k.a. Henry Kuttner) involving this subject, with the Hammond story—about a physician who finds a way to surgically remove his head and send his body out to commit murder—weighing in as one of the magazine's all-time howlers. Better still was the publication of August Derleth's "Memoir for Lucas Payne" (8/39) and "The Slanting Shadow" (4/40), which were essentially first and second drafts of the same story, about a miniaturized man imprisoned in a window pane who is liberated by smashing the pane but then gobbled up by a rat on the floor (not exactly a theme that one forgets upon reading it once). It should be noted that, under the house name of Will Garth, Derleth had a classically bad story in the December 1939 issue, "The Passing of Eric Holm," in which a man copies half of a magic formula

from a grimoire to summon a demon and then inadvertently copies the second half of a formula from the exact same place on the following page (which has turned while he wasn't looking), unaware that the second formula slays the demon upon its summoner.

Two of the worst stories in *Strange Stories* were among the magazine's most interesting. In "Pink Elephants" (8/39), Robert Bloch nearly succeeded in telling, with a perfectly straight face, the story of a man who drinks to avoid seeing the tiny pink elephants emanating from the statuette of an elephant god he has stolen from a sacred temple. The story tips over into giggles, however, with the climactic final-paragraph revelation of Gregory Mitre's gruesome death. Envision it as the narrator does:

"And then I stood up and began to scream and scream, staring at the body of Gregory Mitre—that loathsome mangled body, covered all over with the bruises of stony hoofs, and the little red stabs from the goring tusks of a tiny elephant!"

Where one could chalk up "Pink Elephants" as a foretaste of Bloch's developing sense of macabre humor, the same cannot be said for Eli Colter's "The Crawling Corpse," in which a man finds that a neighbor on a nearby island is carrying on grisly experiments to keep body parts (yes, including disembodied heads) alive after they have been detached from their hosts. An unforgettable scene occurs when the scientist subdues the hero by summoning what the hero thinks is an assistant named Hans—when in fact, he has called out "Hands!" to summon 17 disembodied hands that trundle out to restrain the man.

Mention of *Strange Stories* warrants mention of bad pulp artwork, some of which is reproduced here. *Weird Tales* certainly boasted its shares of bad cover artists: Curtis C. Senf, who had the lion's share of covers in the 1920s, despite the fact that his most frightening monsters never looked any more ferocious than hyperpituitary cavemen; Matt Fox, whose pop-eyed demons made the magazine look like a child's fun book; and Richard Bennett and Ray Quigley, whose coloring book representations were fortunately limited to one and three appearances apiece (respectively).

But Earle K. Bergey, the man who popularized the "bug-eyed-monster-menaces-girl-in-steel-brassiere" scene that appeared on so many science fiction magazine covers, is generally blamed for all of the *Strange Stories* covers, many of which combined two or three bizarre figures who not only had nothing to do with each other, but little, if anything, to do with the stories in the issue.

If it hasn't become clear by now, every pulp magazine that published weird fiction published bad fiction, and it would be easy to rake ones like *Fantastic Adventures*, *Fantastic*, *Ghost Stories* (which rarely published anything good), and even the short-lived *Beyond* and *Fantasy* over the coals. But just to show that no one was immune to the shortcomings of the marketplace, I'll close with a mention of bad weird fiction that appeared in *Unknown Worlds*. *Unknown Worlds* was edited by John W. Campbell, also the editor of *Astounding Science-Fiction*, and is generally looked upon as the most sophisticated fantasy magazine to be published in the pulp era. Part of the reason for the magazine's reputation was Campbell's encouragement of his writers to develop their fantasies along logical lines and to find analogs for the fantastic in the situations of everyday life.

Campbell, however, had a weakness for stories in which scientific explanations could be given for seemingly fantastic events, and sometimes he seemed oblivious to how contrived the more elaborately explained stories read. For example, he seemed to miss the fact that the lead novel for the third issue, Steve Fisher's "Returned to Hell" (5/39), in which a satanic character's control over others is just as explicable in terms of post-hypnotic powers of suggestion as it is through intimations that he's the devil incarnate, was little more than a shudder pulp story—replete with a scantily-clad imperiled heroine, a fiendish arch-villain, and a climactic fire that destroys all the evidence necessary to determine whether or not something supernatural had happened.

But Fisher's story read like a paradigm of rational thinking when compared to Stewart Toland's "The Question Is Answered" (11/39), easily one of the worst pieces of pulp fiction ever published. In this story, a man shot

between the eyes returns to haunt the man who pulled the trigger. Is he a ghost? A reanimated corpse? A spectre of the murderer's guilty conscience? No—he's a living, breathing human, for the bullet passed between the two hemispheres of his brain without damaging either! This answers the question posed by a doctor in the final paragraphs, concerning whether such things can be.

Alas, they can—which leads one to wonder for this story, as with all bad pulp horror, whether there are not some things man is better off not knowing.

This column benefitted greatly from the advice of Robert Weinberg, who has had the misfortune to read more bad horror fiction that should be expected of any man.

Next Issue: From sickos in the hills to psychos in the halls—the pulp antecedents of dark suspense.



Putrid Pulpit Picks:

- Ralph Parker Anderson, "The Purple Light"
- R. Anthony, "The Endocrine Monster"
- W. Elwyn Backus, "Behind The Moon"
- Arthur William Bernal, "Vampires of the Moon"
- A.G. Birch, "The Moon Terror"
- Arthur Burks, "The Wizard of Bird-In-Hand"
- Loretta Burroughs, "The Snowman"
- Eli Colter, "The Crawling Corpse"
- August Derleth, "The Passing of Eric Hobin"
- Lon Dexter, "Earthworms of Karma"
- Douglas M. Dold, "The Thirteenth Floor"
- Gilbert Draper, "The Feline Phantom"
- Arton Eadie, "The Trail of the Cloven Hoof"
- C.M. Eddy, "The Valley of Teeheemen"
- Paul Ernst, "The Black Monarch"
- Ralph Milne Farley, "Another Dracula"
- Steve Fisher, "Returned to Hell"
- Granville S. Hoss, "The Frog"
- F.B. Long, "In the Lair of the Space Monsters"
- Isa-Belle Manzer, "The Transparent Ghost"
- Joel Martin Nichols, "The Devil Ray"
- R.H. Phelps, "Once There Was an Elephant"
- Garnet Raddcliffe, "Camel Vengeance"
- John R. Speer, "Symphony of the Damned"
- Stewart Toland, "The Question Is Answered"

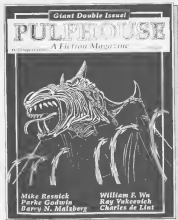
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The Worst of the Cthulhu Mythos

By
ROBERT M. PRICE

It is a sad fact that when asked to consider "What counts as the worst of Cthulhu Mythos fiction?" my mind immediately whispered, "Most of it." Now one might ask how such a state of affairs reflects on H.P. Lovecraft, who might after all be blamed as the inspiration of all this. Did the writers of bad Mythos fiction inherit their faults from him? Were they carrying on his legacy? No to the first, yes to the second.

The first thing that strikes me is how far from the master his self-appointed disciples have strayed. How can they have taken HPL seriously as a writer and gone on to perpetrate what they did in his name? Did all his technique escape them completely?

But then the answer to my puzzlement occurs to me: Lovecraft's aesthetic did not make a great impression on them, but something else in Lovecraft sure did: the Lovecraft Mythos, that collection of lore involving strange deities and banned grimoires. *Yog-Sothoth* and the *Necronomicon* are what stuck in the minds of many readers. This, and not Lovecraft's approach to writing, was what mesmerized them, and was the legacy they carried away from their encounter with the Old Gent.

Only where he kept the props in the background for maximum effect (suggestion is always more effective than direct portrayal), the latter-day imitators dragged them into full view, where they looked pretty much like

Macy's Parade balloons with a nasty temper and a taste for human flesh.

I believe we have lately seen the final stage of the evolution of this process in the great popularity of *Call of Cthulhu*, the Lovecraftian role-playing game. Here textuality has dropped away completely, and all that is left is the imaginative engagement with Mythos monsters and with the catalogs of data concerning them. The Mythos has finally turned on its creator Lovecraft once and for all.

Any overview of the worst of Mythos fiction must accord August Derleth a major place of (dis)honor. Here I choose three Derleth tales for dishonorable mention.

First there is the "Narrative of Winfield Phillips," the concluding episode of the book *The Lurker at the Threshold*. This last section is so different from the preceding two as to qualify as a separate tale in its own right. In fact part of its problem is its vast difference from the sections it is meant to conclude. It contradicts assumptions in the other two, discards important characters, severs major plot threads.

But even in its own right, it is terrible. In it we find, again, a feature of Lovecraft's work gone bad. HPL was a young aficionado of detective mysteries, and it is evident that the piecing together of hints and clues is a central feature in his best horror fiction. But Derleth, himself a great Holmes fan, didn't know when to

stop. Thus he cloned Solar Pons, creating another Derlethian Great Detective, this time Miskatonic University professor Seneca Lapham (the mirror image of Derleth's insufferable Dr. Laban Shrewsbury as well).

In Derleth's hands, the cosmic scope of Mythos apocalyptic shrinks down to a macabre murder case, with Yog-Sothoth as the guilty butler. It is painful indeed to hear Dr. Lapham pontificate on absurdities like the missing persons cases of Charles Fort and how they prove the truth of the Mythos. And then when he puts the case to rest by simply shooting the bad guy...! It's "Hounds of Tindalos of the Baskervilles."

But it gets worse. Derleth didn't want to stray very far from Lovecraft, so in many of his pastiches he simply distilled the basic plot of a Lovecraft tale into a Monarch Notes summary and rewrote the tale with none of the atmosphere. Sort of an "Elfstones of Shannara" approach to the Mythos. One of the worst of these is the inept "Innsmouth Clay," which merely rehashes detail after detail of "The Shadow Over Innsmouth," throwing in a bit of Pygmalion: an artist forms a beautiful female figure from clay fetched from guess where? And guess what? It comes to life and they live finnilly ever after. In reconstructing this tale, investigators get the story from an old boozier who would appear to be Zadok Allen's twin brother. It's just too much, or rather too little.

Perhaps the most typical Derleth perpetration is "The Shuttered Room," which suffers from trying to rewrite several Lovecraft stories at once. Here we catch fading echoes of "Shadow over Innsmouth" plus "The Dunwich Horror." We find that Whateleys, Marshes, and who knows what all have intermarried, and there is an invisible Wilbur's twin type of monster imprisoned in the house, etc., etc. All predictable.

But a more severe flaw, to be inherited by subsequent "Lovecraftian" writers (who, as Dirk Mosig once observed, wound up imitating

Derleth, not Lovecraft), was that by tying in characters from various stories, Derleth was positing a super-epic connecting all of Lovecraft's stories. He was constructing a vast system and wheeling it out to ever greater prominence in the stories. Inspired by the bale-

ful influence of glossary writer Francis T. Laney, Derleth became so fascinated by the trappings of the Mythos, that he was well on the way to making it the focus, instead of the eerie background, of the stories. We already know where that led. Start counting your sanity points, kids.

If Derleth was the devil Mosig made him out to be, then Lin Carter was surely the devil's disciple. Lin had the perverse inclination to take the worst of Derleth and make it badder. I am the first to admit that some few of Carter's Mythos efforts are as good as any in the genre (er, let me rephrase that...). As a Mythos writer he ought to be remembered for "Zoth-Ommog" and "The Winfield Heritage." But with these he also managed to write his share of bad Derleth pastiches, such as "The Dweller in the Tomb" and "Out of the Ages."

His worse fault was, again, the preoccupation with the Yog-damned Mythos. He actually admitted that many of his stories he wrote simply to get certain new Mythos data of his own devising into print, since they weren't official till they hit a professionally published book! In stories such as "Something in the Moonlight" the Mythos is the main character. Nothing remains left to the imagination. It is all an exact science, with every minlonmonster named and assigned. Some of Lin Carter's Mythos tales were little more than role-playing modules.

Yet surely the worst of his tales were the episodes from the *Necronomicon*. Somewhere Lovecraft intimates that Alhazred included various of his own sorcerous exploits in his famous book, so Lin Carter set out to supply them. Not a bad idea, but poor Carter just was not up to the task. Each story ends the same way, with narrator Alhazred ruling the day he

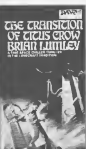
ever sought to plumb the evil mysteries of so-&-so. As Carter explained, they *had* to end this way: they were supposed to be cautionary tales, after all. But a story is no less a failure because it was foredoomed to fail.

And worse yet was the clumsy, cumbrous, pseudo-Elizabethan English in which they were written! It was like reading Thor as scripted by Marvel Comics hacks.

If Lin Carter embraced one of Derleth's chief sins, overspecifying and over-systematizing, surely Brian Lumley embraced the other. If Derleth made Yog-Sothoth no more than the "game afoot" in a Sherlock Holmes pastiche, Lumley in one of the worst Mythos novels ever written, *The Transition of Titus Crow*, made Ithaqua, Cthulhu, and the rest into James Bonds' SMERSH and S.P.E.C.T.R.E.

Some of Lumley's early work printed by Arkham House (and "The Sister City" comes readily to mind) was just terrible to my way of thinking, with silly denouements, absurd premises, etc. But most were free of these faults, and Lumley has always been an entertaining and imaginative Mythos scribe. Chief among his good early work were the "Titus Crow" tales, a blend of psychic investigator and Derleth Mythos. Lumley's scholarly antiquarian exploring horrid mysteries of the past, consulting the *Cthaat Aquadigen* and Feery's Notes on the Necronomicon gave a distinctive Lumley flavor to an old genre.

But with the paperback novel *The Burrowers Beneath*, a peculiar transition began. I have always thought this novel could be described as what Colin Wilson's *The Mind Parasites* would have read like if August Derleth had written it. It is a bit strange, the occult sleuth becoming something of a cross between Doctor



Strange and James Bond. The "transition" was that of the Titus Crow character and series into a new genre, several in fact, as in book after subsequent book. Crow, eventually rejuvenated as a godlike superhero, partakes now of John Carter, now of Randolph Carter, now of Dorothy in the Land of Oz.

I know my remarks here run the risk of criticizing fiction for not being predictable enough, for breaking new ground. But somehow in this case it seems to me not to work, at least in the transitional stages. And that is what we have in *The Transition of Titus Crow*. It is an ungainly adolescent, an ugly larva, on its way to being something else, whether moth or butterfly. In any case, it definitely deserves a place in the canon of worst Mythos fiction.

Ramsey Campbell's anthology *New Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos* ushered in what might be called New Wave Mythos fiction, stories that sought to be faithful in spirit to Lovecraft's legacy, but to eschew all the tired conventions. Too often, however, such stories merely grafted on a Mythos name here or there. Stephen King's "Crouch End" was a fairly effective story of people becoming lost in a disintegrating

nightmare. But what difference did the lone mention of "Alhazred's Dell" make? (It was something like that, as I remember).

This story, though good, just did not seem Lovecraftian in any meaningful sense. I would point the same finger at Campbell's own earlier tale "Cold Print," where the Mythos denouement just seemed to clash jarringly with Campbell's gritty stylistic realism, first emerging in this tale and soon to free itself from the now-superfluous Mythos cocoon.

Michael Shea's *Fatface* seems to me to fail because the story, though well-written

Price's Paragon of the Pastful

August Derleth

The Lurker At The Threshold
"Innsmouth Clay"
"The Shuttered Room"

Lin Carter

Necronomicon stories

Brian Lumley

The Transition of Titus Crow

Ramsey Campbell, editor

New Tales Of The Cthulhu Mythos

Michael Shea

The Colour Out Of Time

and containing memorable turns of phrase, leads on and on and up to a climax that makes nominal use of the Mythos, but in an artificial way. A young prostitute takes pity on a fat guy she sees everyday in the window across the street and decides to offer him a freebie. What she doesn't find out till too late is that he and his buddies are really amorphous shoggoths strapped into shape-giving rubber restrainer suits.

What does this have to do with Lovecraft or shoggoths? It is not so much a case of using a Mythos name when any other might have sufficed (as in the movie CTHULHU MANSION, where what was called "Cthulhu" need only have been a conventional devil). No, the story depended on a modernization of the Mythos, but one that was, to my mind, grossly unsuccessful.

Shea fails again in *The Colour out of Time*, a more conventional attempt to provide a sequel to a Lovecraft tale. But this time we are back to Derleth, with an originally vague and frightening entity concretized into a big black spider. Its a Derlethian version of *Jaws*, as a couple of intrepid know-it-all professors stalk the thing in the Arkham Reservoir. There is an endless account of a sitcom-like obnoxious vacationer who confutes their efforts by distracting the endangered boaters and tourists with his non-stop partying, all described in analytical anthropological terms, as if Albert Wilmarth were called on to dispatch Al Bundy before polishing off *Jaws*.

All in all I see two trajectories here. On the one hand, in some unsuccessful Mythos fiction, the Mythos itself is escaping textuality, making literary incarnation superfluous so that the Mythos itself can roam free. This is the Derleth-Carter-roleplaying game trajectory. On the other, it seems to me we have writers sloughing off the Mythos because they no longer need it to lean on (though it seems to take them a while to realize this, and they write New Wave Mythos in the meantime). Here we see the Campbell-Lumley vector. Some of what I would judge to be the worst of the Mythos canon is the result of the tensions felt in stories written at various points along the two trajectories.

Ⓔ

Book Review

Clawhammer by Paul Dale Anderson
Pinnacle, 1991; 288 pgs.; \$3.95
★ ★ 1/2

Reviewed by Brian Mullen

In *Claw Hammer*, Paul Dale Anderson creates a heartbreaking portrait of Joyce Roberts, a teenager attacked at the age of six by a hammer-wielding maniac. After numerous operations over the years, the disfigured girl is transformed into a beautiful young woman. Though she still feels abnormal, Joyce reluctantly agrees to attend the senior prom with West High School superjock Tony Virusso.

After the prom, Tony takes Joyce to a party where all the caricatures are in place. Besides a few "macho jerk" football players, there's Ellie Flanders, the obligatory blonde sexpot cheerleader who's slept with half the football team.

Eventually, the potent combination of drugs, alcohol, and jealousy leads to an interminable scene of brutality. Anything goes with this bunch. Boys beat up girls and girls kick the stuffing out of the boys. Much of this reads like the script of a bad teenage sex comedy.

But the novel picks up when three of the students are bludgeoned to death after the party. Since the original "hammer man" committed suicide, an apparent copycat is terrorizing this quiet Illinois suburb (just once for the sake of reality, I'd like to see a story such as this take place in a crime-ridden neighborhood). The murders systematically follow a pattern leading to Joyce. Through the characters of Sergeant Carl Erickson and Pathologist Marsha Wade, Anderson concocts a gritty police procedural. There are plenty of grisly details, including cracked heads and empty eye sockets.

Claw Hammer is one of those paradoxical novels which begins with clichés, then becomes a nail-biting thriller (it's very intense despite the fact that the killer's identity is revealed halfway through the book), and concludes with a gruesome climax. The author does such a good job of researching forensics and police investigative technique, that I could overlook some annoying dialogue. Good, nasty fun.

THE FUMBLERS AT THE KEYBOARD

The Worst of Cthulhu Mythos Fiction

By
STEFAN DZIEMIANOWICZ

When Lovecraft wrote his immortal couplet in 1926—"That is not dead which can eternal lie/And with strange aeons even death may die"—he had no idea that it would inspire some of the most deathless—and lifeless—horror fiction ever written. Today, we know better: any idea worth writing about is just as likely to attract the worst imaginations as the best, and the sheer bulk of Cthulhu Mythos fiction that has been produced in the last 66 years is proof that the ideas behind Lovecraft's fiction are considered by many to be worth writing about.

The problem that one encounters when trying to separate the best from the worst Mythos fiction is that one first has to define the Cthulhu Mythos, and this has bedeviled Lovecraft scholars for more than half-a-century. Is the Mythos (which Lovecraft never referred to as such) a set of stories that embody the cosmic principles Lovecraft strove to express through his fiction—in which case it can be narrowed down to a handful of stories by himself and only a few other writers? Is it the trimmings of geographic locales, necromantic texts, and unspeakable deities that August Derleth (who named it in the first place) slapped onto his otherwise routine weird tales to demonstrate their debt to Lovecraft, thereby inspiring hundreds of writers ever since to wrench the most un-Lovecraftian of stories into the context of the Mythos? Or is it some uber-concept that can comfortably accommodate not only Lovecraft's and Derleth's fiction, but all the fiction by professional and non-professional writers that tips its hat to Lovecraft's influence?

Until we can answer this question (and

probably even after we do), it's a safe bet that no two lists of the worst of the Cthulhu Mythos are going to name the same culprits. Thus the following annotations for about 20 or stories are presented as one reader's efforts to be fairly liberal in his interpretation of the Cthulhu Mythos, but discriminating (I hope) in his judgments about what the Mythos should admit. If anything, I hope they show that while not everyone can do good work in the Mythos, just about anyone can do bad work.

"The Hound"—H.P. Lovecraft (1924)

How can the man from whose work the Mythos is derived have written a bad Mythos story, you ask? By writing a bad horror story. This tale of two "neurotic virtuosos" who rob graves to stock their cache of creepy collectibles, and their fate when they run afoul of the violated corpse of an un-dead necromancer, displays some of the worst faults of bad horror fiction: excessively purple prose, plotting that takes a backseat to ghoulish set pieces (one of the principle characters dies an offstage death described in a single sentence because it hastens the end of the story), and a severe case of the Gothic clichés (particularly the baying of a hound that presages every dreadful event in the story). Today, we recognize "The Hound" as the first story to mention the *Necronomicon* and acknowledge that Lovecraft wrote it as a spoof. Back in 1924, however, no one was laughing.

"The Horror from the Hills"

Frank Belknap Long (1931)

This story is a textbook example of how Mythos fiction can go wrong. Which is to say

that, after a suspenseful opening chapter in which a statuette of the Mythos entity Chaugnar Faugn is brought from Asia to an American museum, the story devolves into a series of tedious textbook discussions of evolution, Einsteinian physics, and mythology (some lasting several pages) to force the reader's willing suspension of disbelief in the cosmic (and ultimately comic) events that follow. After Chaugnar's resurrection and escape onto the streets of Manhattan—yes, this is another one of those stories where an idol representing a Mythos entity turns out to actually be a manifestation of the entity—the story takes a loopy weird science turn, with the heroes chasing the entity with a car-mounted "entropy machine" capable of reversing the randomness of Nature that it represents. Even an interpolated dream sequence contributed by Lovecraft in chapter 5 only serves to draw out the conclusion of this short novel interminably.

**"The Return of the Sorcerer"
Clark Ashton Smith (1931)**

When a bookworm in a Mythos tales offers an analogy like this—

"When I opened the yellowing pages, I drew back with involuntary revulsion from the odor which arose from them—an odor that was more than suggestive of physical decay, as if the book had lain among corpses in some forgotten graveyard and

had taken on the taint of dissolution"

—do you ever wonder about the base of experience from which he's operating? Smith's tale of a dismembered sorcerer reconstituting himself to fulfill a prophecy in the *Necronomicon* contains some of the most feverish prose of any Mythos story, as well as one of the most risible scenes in the entire subgenre: When the narrator sees a disembodied forearm and foot dragging themselves along a hallway, the brother of the dead sorcerer breaks down and confesses why he hacked his sibling to pieces—but neither makes an effort to do anything about the limbs parading outside the door.

**"The Lair of the Star Spawn" (1932)
"The Evil Ones" (1940)**

August Derleth and Mark Schorer

Although published eight years apart, these two stories were written in the summer of 1931, when Derleth and Schorer composed all of their collaborations. The first concerns frozen Mythos monsters dredged up from the bottom of Lake Michigan who wreak havoc in Chicago after thawing out; the second, the discovery of the Tcho-Tcho people living beneath the Plateau of Sung in Burma who are planning to loose the being Lloigor upon the world. Both depend on last-minute summonings of the

The Illustrations of Curtis C. Senf

In the January, 1931 issue of *Weird Tales*, Frank Belknap Long described the statuette of Chaugnar Faugn in "The Horror from the Hills" thus:

It was endowed with a trunk and great uneven ears, and two enormous tusks protruded from the corners of its mouth. But it was not an elephant. It was not even closely analogous to an elephant. For the ears were webbed and tentacled, the trunk ending in a huge flaring disk at least a foot in diameter, and the tusks, which intertwined and interlocked at the base of the statue, were as pellucid as glass.

But when stalwart illustrator C.C. Senf read Long's story for inspiration, he apparently stopped at an earlier reference to Chaugnar as

an "elephant god," and delivered an illustration of a rearing elephant (reproduced here) for the first installment of this two-part serial, and a pack of rampaging elephants for the second installment (also reproduced here). Senf solidified his reputation as the most inept illustrator of Mythos fiction on the same occasion that he proved he actually *did* read the stories he was illustrating to their conclusion: his sole illustration for Lovecraft's "The Whisperer in Darkness" (August, 1931), based on the famous last-paragraph climax (reproduced here), appeared on the second page of the text. Granted, Mythos tales drive relentlessly to what are largely foregone conclusions, but Senf made it unnecessary for readers to venture beyond its first 500 words.

Elder Gods to dispatch the threat of the Old Ones, and thus are among the first stories to reduce the Mythos to a cosmic Cowboys and Indians showdown.

"Dig Me No Grave"

Robert E. Howard (1937)

Robert E. Howard's "The Black Stone" is a powerful contribution to the Mythos, thanks to a dream sequence involving pagan sacrifice where Howard had the opportunity to describe a primitive ritual that only he could have rendered convincingly. But with its neurosthenic scholars hyperventilating in every line of dialogue as they prepare for interment the body of a friend who dabbled too deeply in the Mythos, "Dig Me No Grave" shows the otherwise formidable author clearly out of his depth.

"Fane of the Black Pharaoh"

Robert Bloch (1937)

A story from Bloch's Egyptian cycle, this one earns a place in that special Mythos sub-genre known as "The Shaggai Dog Story," wherein are enshrined stories whose ends do not justify their means. The archeologist Cartaret uncovers the tomb of Nephren-Ka, a priest of Nyarlathotep who was gifted with the power of prophecy—and finds ideographs scrawled on the wall millennia ago depicting his own death at the hands of the priests of Nephren Ka as he enters the tomb! Bloch probably meant this to amuse in the same vein as

the in-jokes of the more successful "The Shambler from the Stars."

"The Diary of Alonzo Typer"

William Lumley (1938)

In this "revision," Lovecraft supposedly concocted most of the account of the titular occult investigator whose pursuits in a haunted house lead to his being dragged off to the vaults beneath by an invisible extradimensional entity. Thus Lovecraft must be held accountable for the title character's foolish behavior (he never thinks to leave the house in spite of several life-threatening experiences there), and the infamous final lines recorded even as Typer is pulled kicking and screaming to his doom:

Too late—cannot help self—black paws materialize—I am dragged away toward the cellar...

The *he plus ultra* of bad horror writing, these lines suggest either that Lovecraft was having fun at the expense of his client, or that his evil twin wrote this revision.

"Spawn of the Green Abyss"

C. Hall Thompson (1946)

Thompson was a western writer who seemed to learn how to write horror fiction less by imitation than by studying reconstructive surgery. His first of four *Weird Tales* sales, "Spawn of the Green Abyss" stitches together ideas—and in some cases nearly verbatim passages—from "The Shadow over Innsmouth," "The Dunwich Horror," and "The Call of Cthulhu" into a lumpy mass as dreadful to ponder as the hideous monsters that shamble through it. This tale's plot—Dr. James Arkwright's discovery that his wife was born of the union of a human and a sea monster—is not nearly so bad as its dark-and-stormy prose and lapses in narrative logic (such as a character who spends days underwater but still manages to keep a diary during this time). Derleth threatened Thompson with a lawsuit to stop his filching from Lovecraft. Had he not, Thompson, rather than Derleth, might have become the whipping boy of Lovecraft scholars.



The Web of Easter Island

Donald Wandrei (1948)

This was a truly sad casualty of publishing. Though it mentions nary a Mythos reference, Wandrei's tale of an archeologist who discovers an extradimensional gateway, and the creatures that live on the other side, threatening to invade our own, probably came closer in its first half to evoking the sense of cosmic awe and dread in Lovecraft's writing than any Mythos story. Unfortunately, it then falls apart in its second half. Apparently, Wandrei wrote the novel in 1932, when he was 24 and still burning for his muse. By the time he revised it for publication in 1946, he was a middle-aged man who had grown disillusioned with, and withdrawn from, his chosen genre. One suspects the second part of the novel received the more extensive revisions.



Gods) to help suppress the activities of Old Ones, after which he is spirited away to safe haven on a cosmic plain. The scheme of these stories marks a turn for the worse in Mythos fiction, for the sense of metaphysical dread that is supposed to follow an intellectual confrontation with the concept of Lovecraft's cosmic beings is replaced by an actual physical confrontation from which one can walk away unscathed. What's more, the presence of series hero Dr. Laban Shrewsbury in the background of all the stories completely undermines the image with which Lovecraft's fiction leaves us, of the individual devastated by the meaninglessness of all human endeavor—his own included—following his glimpse of cosmic truths.

"Why Abdul Alhazred Went Mad"

D.R. Smith (1950)

As early as 1950, the fan Mythos was flourishing in small press magazines like Manly Banister's one-shot *Necromantikon*. This dreadful transcription of the uncompleted final chapter of the *Necronomicon*—about the baddest of the Old Ones and his ignominious fate at the hands of a hungry Roman legion—shows all the tics and twitches we associate with the current Fan Mythos: the endless Mythos name dropping, the impenetrable archaic prose, the complete lack of any story to tell.

The Trail of Cthulhu

August Derleth (1962)

The five stories that comprise this Mythos novel were all published in the late '40s and early '50s. To read one is to read them all, for each follows exactly the same pattern: an intelligent young man is contacted by powers of good (tangentially linked to the Elder



"The Seventh Incantation"

Joseph Payne Brennan (1963)

Joseph Payne Brennan was a man of many talents who wrote some of the best dark fantasy published in the postwar years as well as passable detective, sword and sorcery, and western yarns. His heart was in the right place when he wrote this story of Emmet Telquist's efforts to summon the entity Nyogtha with a live animal sacrifice—and the horrible events that transpire when the sacrificial sheep dies of fright during the ceremony, depriving Nyogtha of his preferred meal—but it misses the cosmic terror of the Mythos by several astronomical units.

"The Horror from the Bridge"

Ramsey Campbell (1964)

Let it be said first that Ramsey Campbell's youthful Mythos fiction still reads better than the efforts of most mature Mythos writers. This one, the longest in his *Inhabitant of the Lake* volume, was derived from the line in Lovecraft's *Commonplace Book* that Derleth

eventually used for the posthumous collaboration "The Horror from the Middle Span," but it was clearly patterned on "The Dunwich Horror." Campbell threw everything but the kitchen sink into this one: a Wilbur Whateley stand-in who is blasted to a skeleton by a lightning bolt; a Lavinia Whateley stand-in who is actually the resurrected corpse of a witch dead for over 100 years; and a shoggoth invasion of the local town. There's enough raw material in this one for three or four good-sized Mythos tales, but fortunately Campbell had better ideas to tackle.

"The Watchers out of Time"

August Derleth and H.P. Lovecraft (1974)

This "posthumous collaboration" was left uncompleted at Derleth's death in 1971, but since it begins with a character inheriting ancestral property he never knew existed, and more than intimates that he is derived from Innsmouth stock, it doesn't really need to have an ending. This is the way that about half of Derleth's Mythos stories—written either on his own or in "collaboration" with Lovecraft—run, so Mythos scholars can pretty much infer how it would have concluded. About the only mystery here is whether Derleth would have used the novel to further integrate all of the elements of Lovecraft's Mythos fiction and concentrate the sense of a cosmic conspiracy against humanity.

The Transition of Titus Crow

Brian Lumley (1975)

Even if you could accept Lumley's absurd reduction of the Mythos to an espionage thriller in *The Burrowers Beneath* (1974), this sequel—which sets the stage for *The Clock of Dreams* (1978), *Spawn of the Winds* (1978), *The Moons of Borea* (1979), and the entire "Hero of Dreams" quartet—is pretty hard to take. Titus Crow (who fared much better in Lumley's short fiction) achieves apotheosis and becomes the equivalent of a cosmic drinking buddy with the Elder Gods. The Old Ones come off looking like lager louts on holiday. Such treatments give a whole new definition to the expression, "the banality of evil."

The Satan Trilogy

Brian McNaughton (1977-1980)

Long before the advent of splatterpunk, horror and sexually explicit fiction were cozy bedfellows. *Satan's Love Child* (1977), *Satan's Mistress* (1978), and *Satan's Seductress* (1980) are representatives of that species of post-'60s horror fiction that used the orgiastic side of black magic as an excuse for peppering novels with steamy scenes of hardcore porn. In this trilogy, Brian McNaughton's Satanists are actually adepts in Lovecraftian lore. Though their plots appear to have been developed around the sex scenes, these novels should not be dismissed too easily, for they show an uncommon familiarity not only with Lovecraft's fiction, but with the Incanubula of the Lovecraft circle.

"The Second Act"

t. Winter-Damon (1984)

Criticizing Fan Mythos fiction for its failure to grasp Lovecraftian concepts is a little like criticizing fan letters for bad punctuation. Most of these stories were never meant to be published, much less reviewed, in public, and reflect a sort of enthusiasm for their subject that should be rechannelled rather than discouraged. This story appeared in *Eichings and Odysseys* #5 and can serve as a touchstone for criticizing all Fan Mythos fiction. It tells of a rock band that attempts to use an arena concert to summon the Old Ones, and is rendered in an impressionistic style as hokey as the image-blitz final stage show in Skipp and Spector's *The Scream*. It's the sort of idea that doesn't lend itself well to the Mythos, and probably never should have been attempted. 'Nuff said.

"The Sussex Manuscript"

Fred Pelton (1987)

Clark Ashton Smith's "The Coming of the White Worm" (1941) was probably the first Mythos-related story to present itself as a full transcription from a Mythos tome, and Lin Carter proved Smith's most devout disciple along these lines. But Fred Pelton topped them and everyone else with this nearly unreadable 13,000 word transcription of the *Necronomicon* in Olde Englysshe. In his introduction to it in

Crypt of Cthulhu #63 (1989), Robert Price notes that August Derleth had his hands on Pelton's ms. as early as 1946, and planned to publish it until he was dissuaded by Donald Wandrei. Had he done so, the book would have become as curious an artifact as the deluxe Arabic edition of the *Necronomicon* published some years ago: something to sit on a shelf and not to be consulted.

"The Bell in the Tower"

Lin Carter and H. P. Lovecraft (1989)

Pick a Lin Carter Lovecraft pastiche—any Lin Carter Lovecraft pastiche—and you get sentences like the following:

Books like Ignatius Donnelly's fabulous account of Atlantis I absorbed with zest, and a dozen obscure precursors of Charles Fort enthralled me for a time with their meticulous documentation of inexplicable occurrences...but in naught could I find a path to the utterly unplumbed gulfs beyond the reach of the astronomers or the cognizance of mundane cosmographers—the nameless vortices of never-dreamed-of strangeness, where form and symmetry, light and heat, even matter and energy themselves, may be unthinkable metamorphosed or totally wanting—the ultimate, unguessable regions beyond the strictures of time and space, where the laws of Euclidean geometry or of time itself are bent awry, and where the chimerical and the self-contradictory are the norm, while the rational and the tangible are but fancies.

Carter was a good pasticheur, but he was so in love with the sound of his own prose that it's sometimes an ordeal to get to the end of his sentences, much less his stories, without completely losing track of what he's writing about. His stories yield a criticism pertinent to most Mythos fiction: if you can't see the wonders for the style, you're falling short of Lovecraft's intentions for his "Mythos" fiction.

B

Stefan's Most Miserable Mythos:

H.P. Lovecraft, "The Hound"
 Frank B. Long, "The Horror from The Hills"
 Clark A. Smith, "The Return Of The Sorcerer"
 Derleth/Schorer, "The Lair of the Star Spawn"
 Derleth/Schorer, "The Evil Ones"
 Robert E. Howard, "Dig Me No Grave"
 Robert Bloch, "Fane of the Black Pharaoh"
 William Lumley, "The Diary of Alonzo Typer"
 C. Hall Thompson, "Spawn of the Green Abyss"
 Donald Wandrei, *The Web of Easter Island*
 D.R. Smith, "Why Abdul Alhazred Went Mad"
 August Derleth, *The Trail of Cthulhu*
 Joseph P. Brennan, "The Seventh Incantation"
 R. Campbell, "The Horror From The Bridge"
 Lovecraft/Derleth, "The Watchers out of Time"
 Brian Lumley, *The Transition of Titus Crow*
 Brian McNaughton, *The Soton Trilogy*
 L. Winter-Damon, "The Second Act"
 Fred Pelton, "The Sussex Manuscript"
 Carter/Lovecraft, "The Bell in the Tower"



SMALL PRESS BOX

BY
BOB MORRISH

By now, you're probably knee-deep in bad horror. You may even be ready for a break from lists, articles, etc., that are solely concerned with crap. Well, you've come to the right place. Sort of. I *do* have a sidebar on "the worst of the small press," but for the most part, this is a standard "Small Press Box" column, with both good and bad included.

As always, if you feel so moved to purchase any of the publications reviewed, it's recommended that you add a dollar or so to the price listed, in order to cover shipping charges.

Necrofile

#4 Spring, 1992, 28 pgs., \$2.50
101 Lockwood St., W. Warwick, RI 02893
Checks payable to Necronomicon Press

Tekel-IV

#3 Fall, 1991, 104 pgs., \$4.50
#4 Winter/Spring, 1992, 128 pgs., \$4.50
106 Hanover Ave., Pawtucket, RI 02861
Checks payable to Montilla Publications

These three recent issues of these two fine non-fiction magazines elicited varying reactions from me: *Nf* is better than ever, a cover-to-cover smorgasbord of info and opinions, while *Tek* is a tad inconsistent: #3 is disappointingly disjointed, a seeming amalgam of unconnected and unfocused pieces, while #4 is back on the right track, with several interesting pieces and a discernable focus.

Nf is especially attractive because it devotes considerable coverage to a sub-genre (or cross-genre?) that's always been of great interest to me: horror/SF. There is an extensive

and insightful review of three of Philip K. Dick's dark SF novels—*The Three Stigmata Of Palmer Eldritch*, *Ubik*, and *A Scanner Darkly*—by Rob Latham (although Latham loses me when he recommends tracking down "some old tattered copies tucked away in a bookstore" rather than purchasing the recent Vintage trade paperback reissues, which are "clearly designed for the upscale crowd...[with] glitzy computer art packaging"). This is followed by a

NECROFILE

The Journal of Necrotic Fiction

Volume 4, Number 1, Spring 1992

Editor: David J. Matthews

Editorial Board: David J. Matthews, David J. Matthews, David J. Matthews

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review of three of K.W. Jeter's dark SF novels, *Madlands*, *Farewell Horizontal*, and *Dr. Adder*. Both articles offer worthwhile critiques and

both will hopefully entice more readers to sample works—by Dick and Jeter, or by others—in this interesting sub-genre, which perhaps offers more potential for the future of the horror genre than any other such "cross-breeding"—including the much-hyped "dark suspense" mixing.

Other features include a review of the four "best-of" horror reprint volumes (including our own *Quick Chills* anthology); an article dissecting Thomas Ligotti's quality prose and recent "genre celebrity" status; Steve Rasnic Tem's review of the high-brow anthology *The Literary Ghost*; and another hilarious column from Ramsey Campbell, detailing a truly awful novel from the '50s, *The Troglodytes* by Nai Rafcam.

Through it all, even though there is no editorial presence in *Nf* (a fact that I have bemoaned in the past), the issue's material nonetheless seems coherent; individual pieces of a logical whole.



The same can't be said for *Tek* #3. Although I sang the praises of the first two issues of *Tek*, this one just didn't grab me. I'd probably still recommend it, but only marginally.

This issue is a special Ramsey Campbell number, and there's an excerpt from his recent novel, *The Count Of Eleven*, as well as an interview and analysis by Stefan Dziemianowicz. The interview is probably the first thing I've ever read by Stefan that didn't do much for me—mostly because Campbell has been interviewed so much that there are no questions left that haven't been asked ad nauseum.

There's also a Horror Comics Appreciation section, comprised of a review of the recent *Horror Comics: An Illustrated History*; an overview of underground horror comix; an article on the the infamously visceral *Faust* series; and a review of some recent "grim funny-

books." Rather than leaving me with an appreciation for horror comics as a whole, the section left me wondering about the skewed coverage—mostly ignoring the mainstream, with the exception of the *Illustrated History* review.

Well, anyway...what did I like? There's a nice portfolio of Rodger Gerberding artwork (the graphic aspect of the mag has always been *Tek*'s strong point and this issue is no different); a spirited exchange of abuse in the Letters column; an interesting column of small press reviews by W.H. Pugmire.

Tek #3 also has a feature similar to our own new "TSF BiblioFile" section—with fiction by, a bibliography of, and an interview with, Joseph Citro. We ran our first "TSF BiblioFile" section in issue #9, so *Tek* didn't really beat us to the punch on this idea. However, they did get the jump on us with their "Retrospectives" column, which is a glimpse back by Scott Urban at overlooked books of the past. We here at TSF had discussed a similar column but didn't get past the planning stages until just recently. Our column, entitled *The Overlooked Library*, will be written by Don D'Amassa and will debut in issue #11. Watch for it! Anyway...given the minor similarities between *Tek* and TSF, it seems clear that the old idiom is true: "great minds think alike." And so do we.

While I'm disappointed with *Tek* #3, issue #4 gets the mag back on the right track, with three interesting-to-fascinating sections: a Thomas Ligotti section, including interview, biblio, etc.; a Harry O. Morris section, with portfolio and appreciation; a Stefan Grabinski section, with fiction, an essay, and an interview with Grabinski's primary literary translator. There's also a great *Retrospectives* column by Scott Urban, and insightful review of John Shirley's *Webones* by Stefan-with-the-long-last-name, some interesting letters from readers, and more. On the down side, there's a worthless section on vampires, but, hey, let's not quibble with one bad apple. *Tek* #4 is full of good stuff; try it, you'll like it.

Deathrealm

#16 Spring, 1992, 56 pgs., \$4.00
3223-F Regents Park, Greensboro, NC 27405
Checks payable to Mark Rainey

You know the old saying "the rich get rich-

er, the poor get poorer." Well, while that idiom may normally carry distinctly negative overtones after 12 years of Reagan and Bush economics, the usage is actually quite positive in this case, because *Deathrealm*—already among the small press elite—just keeps getting better.

Witness Brad Cahoon's "The Arachnarium," wherein the protagonist finds that his spider-loving neighbor has a strange involvement with the disappearance of several local children. Or Jan Lars Jensen's stunning "Brutal Applause," concerning a mind-controlling creature—the Gunnar-mórtis—that invades and



commandeers the protagonist's house, forcing him and his family to give grotesque performances. Or Jeffrey Goddin's chilling "Country Wedding," in which a family that's out of its element at a rural wedding ceremony finds themselves victimized by an even older ritual.

There's also William Pardue's "The Gift Of The Conqueror" (predictable but extremely well-done nonetheless), William R. Trotter's "The Boss Of The Seventh Level" (a fascinating, if at times rough-around-the-edges, take on the

true purpose of video games), and three other tales. Non-fiction includes a look back at the *Dark Shadows* TV series and a look forward at the soon-to-released *HELLRAISER* III.

The only bad news is that *Dr* editor/publisher Mark Rainey recently lost his job, and the future of the magazine is somewhat in doubt. Here's hoping that Rainey is back on his feet quickly, both because he's a great guy and because I'd hate to see *Dr* go away.

Late-breaking news: *Dr* #17 just came in, and it's just as outstanding as earlier issues. Also, Rainey reports that prospects are excellent that *Dr* will be taken over by a new publisher, who will retain Rainey as editor.

Doppelganger

#14, 1992; \$3.50

46 Britany Farms Rd., Apt., 330,
New Britain, CT 06053

Checks payable to Jamie Meyers

In my last column, I sang the praises of *Not One Of Us*, a digest that I'd been aware of for several years, but which I had never actually sat down and read. This time around, it's *Doppelganger* that fits the above description. Issue #14 recently arrived and, even though I own some of the previous issues, I must admit that I hadn't actually read any of them, and I never knew just how good *Dop* could be. Incidentally, comparing *Not One Of Us* and *Doppelganger* makes sense for another reason: both "zines" were originally edited and published by John Benson, until Jamie Meyers took over editing of *Dop* a few issues back. The two publications are still very similar in appearance—and, apparently, in levels of quality.

Steve Vernon's "Sorrowcrow" is a darkly disturbing tale about two young boys' experiments with homosexuality—experiments which end in murder. Bentley Little's "Nursery School" is similarly disturbing in its depiction of a day care center where degeneracy is the norm. Imagine yourself as a concerned parent paying an unannounced visit to the nursery school one day, only to overhear your child's class singing "Thank you, Randy's penis. We're glad you came to see us." A few seconds later, as you stand there wondering if you really heard what you thought you did, a burly man walks out of the classroom zipping up his pants. Disturbing, no?

Andrew Kelly's "The Cowgirl Who Rode The Lonesome Trail" is a hauntingly poetic piece about a woman who confronts her own ghost, an ethereal reminder of a traumatic childhood experience. Mark Sadler's excellent "Summer Fires" concerns a cop and an arsonist, but it's really about long-smoldering guilt. Another tale of guilt can be found in James C. Glass' "The Trial of Heinrich Volger"—my pick for the best story in the issue. Volger, a reluctant Nazi concentration camp guard in WWII, returns to Dachau almost fifty years later, where he is captured and tried for war crimes by the ghosts of the camp's victims.

There are also good stories by Kathleen Jurgens and Gene Matthews. *Doppelganger* #14 is like a small press highlight film; pick up a copy and enjoy the show.

Souls in Pawn
1992, 160 pgs., \$7.95
140 Dickie Avenue, Staten Island, NY 10314
Checks payable to Horror's Head Press

Souls in Pawn is AKA *Noctulpa* #6; after issue #4, editor/publisher George Hatch decided to drop the running title and name each annual "Issue" based on its theme. Hence *Noctulpa* #5 was titled *Gulgnair and Other Furies*, and #6 is *Souls in Pawn*.

In past issues of *TSE*, I've raved about both

Noctulpa #4 and *Gulgnair*, so I approached *Souls in Pawn* with great anticipation. The verdict? A definite thumbs-up, "you should buy this" recommendation, but not quite measuring up to its predecessor. One of the reasons for that



judgement is Nicholas Scarcy's artwork. Whereas *Gulgnair* featured great illustrations by Peter Gilmore, the photo-montage artwork in *Souls in Pawn*, quite frankly, strike me as

A Dozen Dogs from the Small Press

The following is a list of 12 publications which I found to be the least worthwhile of the hundreds of small press books and zines that I've read. Presented for your (dis)pleasure in alphabetical order! Read them and weep—or don't read them and be happy.

Chronicles Of The Cthulhu Codex—Really, really abysmal Mythos tales. Stuff that you'd be embarrassed to have your name associated with. HPL must be convulsing in his grave.

Dead Of Night—Not as bad as most of the other stuff on this list, but still dismal. Knowing that every single tale involves a vampire doesn't help in the suspense department.

Dark Side—One of the absolute worst print jobs that I've ever seen. Attempting to read more than two pages in one sitting results in a splitting headache. Oh, and when you do manage to read it, the contents are more on the down side than on the dark side.

Prisoners Of The Night—This "all vampires, all the times" tag would qualify as simply mediocre if it wasn't for the incredibly outrageous \$15 price tag. Never have I paid so much for so little.

Lights Out!—Here we have a non-fiction entry in our list, a newsletter devoted to the career of Robert McCammon. It wouldn't have been so bad if editor/publisher Hunter "Goat Dance" Goatley didn't drool his admiration for the author across every single page.

simply the latest tired derivations of a style that was long ago mastered by J.K. Potter and Harry O. Morris, not to mention Glimore (although Scarcy's cover illo is nice).

Enough carping. There is some great fiction here, and that's the main thing. In "Context," Don D'Amassa perfectly captures the pretentious disposition of a condescending teacher who's either suffering from a psychosis or discovering a doppelgänger. Jeffrey Osler's "The Shabbie People" is one of the author's finest works, detailing a lonely man who brings home a somewhat alien—just how alien is the question—street wail, who engenders his obsession and then departs, leading the man on a fruitless search and simultaneous descent into madness. Adam Meyer's "Swimmer" is an extremely well-written tale of a frustrated woman who finds allure in the ghost of a drowning victim. Norman Partridge, fast becoming one of the most consistently-satisfying writers this genre has to offer, comes up with "Tombstone Moon," concerning a hired killer who dispatches the leader of a satanic cult, at the behest of the leader's power-hungry son. Unfortunately, the murder has greater consequences than either could have realized.

There's also top-notch work by D.R. McBride, Robert Frazier, Carrie Richerson, and Anke Kriske. Even the stories that didn't entirely

work for me, such as Miroslaw Lipinski's "It's A Lonesome Old Town" (too cute) and Graham Watkin's "Rendezvous" (excessive torture scenes) had their moments.

Going back over these stories in order to write this review makes me realize just how good *Souls in Pawn* really is. Aside from my minor misgivings about the art, *Souls in Pawn* is one of the best pubs of the year.

Science Fiction Detective Tales by Gary Lovisi

1986, 112 pgs., \$7.95

P.O. Box 209, Brooklyn, NY 11228

Checks payable to Gryphon Publications

Now why, you may ask, is a non-fiction SF title from six years ago being reviewed in a horror column? Well, I decided to review this book for three reasons: 1) I'm a sucker for genre fiction reference works 2) although I've not read huge numbers of SF titles, my favorites among those I have read have often contained healthy doses of mystery (as in Dan Simmons' *Hyperion* and Jack McDevitt's *Talent For War*) and sometimes actual detective work (as in John Stith's *Death Toils* and F. Paul Wilson's *Dydetown World*) 3) it's my feeling that, in a fair number of cases, novels which combine SF and detective themes also touch upon horror, a premise that's reinforced by the following passage, which is in reference to a

Mean Lizards - I won't go into any great details on this one, since I only saw the inaugural issue, but it was remarkably forgettable.

New Blood - Okay, so maybe this one doesn't truly belong here. I nonetheless found the contents of the last couple of issues to fall far short of the expectations raised by the gaudy packaging. And the mag vanished without a trace shortly after making claims of new national distribution deals. And I grew exceedingly tired of editor/publisher Chris Lacher's pseudo-hard guy attitude. So it's here on this list,

So there.

Night Gown - V'nifty publishing at its worst. There's unfortunately nothing to break the monotony of several stories by author/editor/publisher/best boy/gaffer Jeff Kahan.

The Obligatory Sin - Unless you're into construction paper and crappy stories, this ain't for you. The bizarre format calls for obligatory abuse.

Tales By Moonlight II - Although this Tor paperback isn't a small press item per se, it's certainly about the small press, as every tale within is reprinted from the small press. I had high expectations

for this one, but was incredibly disappointed. Like virtually everything editor Jessica Amanda Salmonson touches, this book is pseudo-highbrow and super-pretentious. Her magazine *Fantasy & Terror* is likewise off-putting.

Virgin Meat - Risqué title. Lame contents. 'Nuff said.

Wigginsnatch - Opinionated. Pointless. Unfocused. Take it away (please).

(Please excuse my lapse into incomplete, staccato sentences. It was caused by my having to look over all of these publications again.)

couple of specific titles:

"Though these are detective stories, they are science fiction also—and once you've read them, you will see that they can be quite effective horror fiction as well."

The books that Lovisi is referring to here are Eric Norden's *The Ultimate Solution* and Len Deighton's *SS-GB*, and these are only two of several books which the author managed to get me interested in via his descriptions. Books by Stanislaw Lem, Hal Clement, Gardner Dozois, and Nicholas Yermakov, among others, also caught my eye as particularly intriguing examples of "dark SF" (my term, not Lovisi's).

Although I enjoyed this book, it's not without its flaws, a couple of which merit mention. First, it's difficult to read—the text appears to have been set directly from type-written pages, with the resulting text blurry and hard on the



eye, not to mention that it's bound too close to the interior margins (Note: Lovisi indicates that the book will soon undergo a second printing, which may take care of this). The second problem may be related to the first: there are quite a few instances of poorly-worded sentences, weird constructions, and repetitive phrasing. However, there are also many passages where the author's writing is just fine, leading me to believe that the text is a first and only draft which didn't lend itself to easy editing since it was typewritten and not on a computer.

Finally, there are lots of bibliographic details and vague qualitative judgements, but often not enough (at least to my thinking) in the way of plot summary and analysis.

Nonetheless, I *did* enjoy this book. I applaud Lovisi's efforts, and—even though I would've preferred a little different format—I judge it to be a most worthwhile endeavor.

Briefly Noted:

As mentioned earlier, I've become a convert to John Benson's *Not One Of Us* (44 Shady Lane, Storrs, CT 06268). Issue #9 (June, 1992; \$3.50 + \$1.00 shipping) is not quite as good as its predecessor, but it's still damned good. Highlights include: Steve Vernon's "Deathdreams," in which a mind reader unadvisedly tries to read the thoughts of Death himself; "Confessions," a tale of a priest obsessed with the confessions of a killer, written by Jeff VanderMeer, a highly-regarded author who I had been previously unimpressed by; the bizarre and blackly comedic "Mrs. Belegrechka" by Mark McLaughlin. Also note good stuff by Stephen Mark Rainey, Jeffrey Osier, Carroll Welker, and others.

On the other hand, I still haven't been converted by *After Hours* (P.O. Box 538, Sunset Beach, CA 90742-0538). Editor/publisher William Raley's tastes just seem to run somewhat contrary to mine, and issue #15 (Summer, 1992; \$4 + \$1 shipping) is no exception. There is some good work here, but overall I came away unimpressed. Worth mentioning are: Ty Drago's "The Attendant," which overcomes some extremely wooden writing in the beginning to become an engaging tale of Death making "mercy killings" on a crashed airliner; Josh Partlow's "Munich Woods," a well-done "feral forest" tale; and Dean Alan Wehrli's "The People Outside The Window," which features a nice twist ending.

B

Hidden Horrors

by William
Schoell

In keeping with this special issue of *The Scream Factory*, this installment of *Hidden Horrors* will deal with some of the worst horror novels you've probably never read—or even heard of. Since the last thing I want to do is get into feuds with fellow authors, the first thing I'll do is remind everyone that what's "wonderful" or "horrible" is entirely subjective. And to take some of the sting out of my harsh remarks (what a wuss!) I'll quote from a review of one of my own novels, *Fatal Beauty*: "This book will provide consolation to unpublished authors, for if drek like this can get published, anything can get published." (Or something along those lines.) There. Now that I've said that, I can dispense with feeling any guilt over "bashing" the following books and authors. In no particular order:

The Ancient Enemy by Donald Thompson is a piss-poor tale of cockroaches killing the inhabitants of an elegant desert whorehouse. If the author had spent more time on the insects and less on some of the characters' efforts to combat a group of hoodlums, this might have been a much better book.

The Cats by Nick Sharman (who later wrote a credible novel entitled *The Scourge*) is the weakest of half a dozen books about killer felines. Sharman is never able to make the "attack" of these lethal kitties seem even remotely plausible.

Children of the Dark by Charles Veley was for anyone who wondered what a horror story written by Billy Graham would be like, with a premise that was sort of "CHILDREN OF THE DAMNED meets Aimee Semple McPherson." While blaming horrible events on the "divinity" is no more inane than blaming them on Satan, this book's problem is that it resists any intellectual or scientific approach to the subject of



God. The ending reads as if Veley were suddenly overwhelmed by an attack of religious hysteria! Veley later wrote a much better book entitled *Night Whispers*.

Bonegrinder by John Lutz is a terrible novel about an alleged lake monster that has no suspense, "Movie of the Week"-type characters, and a really dreadful cop-out ending.

Off Season by Jack Ketchum details what ensues when an inbred family of cannibals attacks an editor and her friends at her rented house in Maine. When women's nipples start getting bitten off by hungry children, you know it's time for the author to see a psychiatrist and you wonder how low a publisher will sink in order to make a dollar. Ballantine Books seemed to think they had another *Lord of the Flies* on their hands, but this was trash and even Ketchum must have known it.

666 by Jay Anson was practically a textbook case of really lousy, stupid horror. After writing the "fact-based" *Amityville Horror*, Anson and his publishers figured they'd make a bundle on a book that was supposed to be fiction. The characters are stick figures, the prose abysmal, and the plot—with Satan reduced to playing silly tricks on people—too idiotic for words.

Heads by David Osborn deals with a medical project in which the live severed heads of terminal patients are attached to computer consoles. Another writer might have really made something out of this, but Osborn's superficial treatment, perfunctory approach, one-dimensional characters, and flat wind-up completely fail to exploit his horrifying premise.

The Devil's Cat by William W. Johnstone was the fourth in a series about a couple battling the forces of evil, this time in a small town beset with an overabundance of cats. Cardboard characters and a choppy, amateurish writing style make this one pretty bad and pretty boring in spite of all the gruesome goings-on.

Where Shadows Fall by Judith Kelman is a mediocre thriller with an excellent first chapter and one of the most ludicrous wind-ups in history.

Kelman's killer disguises himself as no less than three different people with fulltime jobs at the same institution and yet none of his co-workers ever notice? Agatha Christie herself couldn't have made anything out of this mess. The climax has some good opportunities for real horror, but Kelman even muffs that.

And who could ever forget Ruby Jean Jensen's *Such a Good Baby*, in which a woman is

impregnated by snakes and gives birth to a homicidal infant; or Richard Lewis' *The Spiders*, in which the entomologists battling the title creatures keep referring to them as insects (well-researched, eh?). Or Thomas Luke's *The Heirloom*, about—believe it or not—a killer chair. Don Gold's *The Park* manages to make a psychotic sniper shooting teenagers boring while Phil Davis' *The Dancer's Death* takes a psychotic transvestite police lieutenant and turns it into a suspenseless miasma of clichés. *My Sweet Audrina* proved that V.C. Andrews had written herself out with *Flowers in the Attic*, and the only thing worse than Martin

Cruz Smith's *Nightwing* is the "killer bat" movie made from It. Thomas Mordant's *Blood Root* concerns a killer oak tree, and *The Nursery* is a tedious tale of a deranged couple ambushing honeymoon couples.

Although the following books are much better known, I don't think that we should let "name" or "cult" writers get off so easily. As far as I'm concerned Stephen King should have left the manuscripts for *Firestarter* and *The Tommyknockers* in the baggage section of any plane he was on at the time—and hoped the cargo bay doors opened while they were in there. I think Graham Masterton has written some splendid books—the seminal *The Manitou* and *Feast* among them—but *The Wells of Hell* (which featured well water turning people into crustaceans) wasn't one of them. T.M. Wright is a talented writer, but was it necessary for him to write a whole series of books (including *People of the Dark*) about people who literally spring from the earth (fully dressed?) and wander about with homicidal intent? Surely one or two would have been enough, but Wright had to stretch an intriguing, if far-fetched, idea to the breaking point. Also Wright's *The Playground* is a tedious and predictable tale of a town populated by witches.

Charles Grant has written a couple of good books—as well as a few stinkers. *Night Songs* deals with an island bedeviled by a voodoo spell which keeps the dead from resting, and was even worse and tiresome than some of his lesser "Oxrun Station" stories. *The Pet*, a *Twilight Zone* episode stretched out to book length, just doesn't work. It's more like a soap opera for young adults than a creditable novel of terror. Grant, like Ramsey



Campbell, may be a talented writer, but his and Campbell's books often lack energy and intensity, and never seem to catch fire, which is probably why Koontz and McCammon have graduated to the bestseller lists while they haven't.

From the old to the new: Joseph Payne Brennan's short story collection *The Shapes of Midnight* has a couple of minor gems in it, but more stinkers that wouldn't have made it on *Night Gallery*. Stephen King's gushing Intro (for which he was probably paid more than Brennan) must have strained his imagination to the limit. And as far as wunderkind Clive Barker goes, every time I read him I'm reminded of Anderson's classic *The Emperor's New Clothes*. Some of Barker's work is clever and imaginative, grant you, but so much more of it (*Cabal* and "The Body Politic," for instance) reads like rejects from a college "literary" magazine: no real characters, non-existent plotting, pretentious allusions and references.

Now, now, angry authors, no plotting of revenge. 'Tis just one person's opinion. (But just in case, I'm giving all your names to my cousin in the sixth precinct!)



Audio Review

Audio Tapes from Spine-Tingling Press
Caught in Time by Matthew J. Costello
Bonethrower by Richard Sutphen
(90 mins./1 cassette. \$9.95).

Reviewed by Peter Enfantino

I'm a sucker for a time travel story. I love

"what-ifs." Here's a time travel story with a twist and a what if. An eccentric billionaire (aren't they all eccentric?) of the future, obsessed with the legend of Jack the Ripper, hires a computer whiz to build him a contraption that will enable him to venture back to 1880s London. There, the rich loony hopes to capture Jack in the act and discover his true identity. So far so good.

Hidden Horribles

V.C. Andrews, *My Sweet Audrina*

Jay Anson, 666

Joseph Payne Brennan, *The Shapes of Midnight*

Phil Davis, *The Dancer's Death*

Don Gold, *The Park*

Charles Grant, *Night Songs*

Ruby Jean Jensen, *Such A Good Baby*

William W. Johnstone, *The Devil's Cat*

Judith Kelman, *Where Shadows Fall*

Jack Ketchum, *The Off Season*

Stephen King, *The Tommyknockers*

Richard Lewis, *The Spiders*

Thomas Luke, *The Hellroom*

John Lutz, *Bonegrinder*

Graham Masterton, *The Wells of Hell*

David Osborn, *Heads*

Nick Sharman, *The Cats*

Martin Cruz Smith, *Nightwing*

Donald Thompson, *The Ancient Enemy*

Charles Veley, *Children of the Dark*

T.M. Wright, *The Playground*

The set-up is intriguing, the characters decently drawn out. But the problem is the ending, which is downright lame. I said this was also a "what if" story: the plotline is "What if Matthew J. Costello and not Nicholas Meyer had written *Time After Time*?"

In both versions, Jack gets ahold of a device that will enable him to commit more widespread murder. The Meyer version I can swallow. Sure, it had its moments of impossibility, but red flags didn't go up. Costello closes his story trying to convince us that 1880s Jack could understand the workings of 21st Century computing.

Right. But I'd have to recommend the first part of the tape for its intriguing premise.

However, if I was Matthew J. Costello, I'd be suing Richard Sutphen of Spine-Tingling Press for tacking on the "excerpt" from Sutphen's own separate tape, *Bonethrower*. This has got to be one of the kneeshlappers of 1992. The narrator (I assume it's Sutphen himself) tells the story of a traveling couple who buy a possessed Indian bracelet and the troubles that follow. But don't think you'll find out what happens, because this story ends...er, abruptly (when side two runs out of tape!). Luckily, (or rather, unluckily) I read this swill last year in Sutphen's collection *Sexpunks and Savage Sagas*, so I know I'm not missing anything.

Caught ★★ / *Bonethrower* ★

Reference Shelf



Reference Guide To Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror

by Michael Burgess
Libraries Unlimited, 1992; \$45
ISBN 0-87287-611-X
★ ★ ★

Reviewed by Bob Morrish

The existence of this book is an indication of just how far the science fiction, fantasy, and horror genres have come—for this book is actually a reference guide to other reference works that are concerned with the three genres.

Author Burgess provides a concise summary of more than five hundred reference books, including a description of the organization and contents of each, with commentary on the work's timeliness (i.e. is it now outdated?), completeness, and general quality (with comparisons to other books covering similar territory). This *Reference Guide* is primarily aimed at library purchasing agents, but is also of great value to anyone involved in genre research or scholarship. Indicative of this is Burgess' inclusion of a "Personal Research Library" among his listing of core collections for various sizes and types of libraries.

Burgess divides his subject matter into twenty-eight categories (e.g., "Encyclopedias

and Dictionaries," "Readers and Critical Guides," "Biographical and Literary Directories," etc.). This makes it a tad difficult to find certain books—for example, trying to recall whether Randall Larson's *The Robert Bloch Companion* should fall under "Readers and Critical Guides" or "Author Bibliographies" can be a bit vexing—but this is alleviated by an excellent index.

Having reviewed so many other reference works in the course of compiling this volume, Burgess has successfully emulated their strengths and avoided their weaknesses. If you think you may need this book, then trust me, you definitely do.



The Frankenstein Catalog

by Donald F. Glut
McFarland, 1984; 525 pgs; \$49.95
★ ★ ★

Television Horror Movie Hosts

by Elena M. Watson
McFarland, 1991 242 pgs; \$29.95
★ ★

Reviewed by Peter Enfantino

Way back in 1973, Scarecrow Press published the definitive study of Mary Shelley's famous creation: *The Frankenstein Legend* by Donald F. Glut. That book was an incredible compendium of facts, trivia, and commentary on pert near everything you ever needed to know (and plenty you really didn't) about Frankenstein.

Incredibly enough, *The Frankenstein Catalog*, Glut's updated (to 1984) volume published by McFarland (the best publisher of genre non-fiction these days) is even more massive and detailed, listing the monster's appearances in comics, movies, radio, TV, records, and all other medium you could imagine. The book is sparsely illustrated with stills and comic panels, but the words are what

count here.

It's hard to find fault with a book so lovingly researched, but to be realistic, this is mostly for diehard Franky nuts and reference junkies. The type of fanatic who just has to know how many times Frank appeared on *The Sonny and Cher Show* (for the record: 3) or how many issues really appeared in that well-respected Spanish comic version back in '59 (2). Luckily, I'm just that type of fan, so I give it my highest recommendation. Hopefully, Glut will now turn his bibliographical talents to other film creatures.

Everyone reading this who's over the age of thirty or so has fond memories of local monster movie shows on Saturday nights and the hosts who entertained us by burning, interrupting or flushing the flicks they played during their programs.

The first half-dozen chapters of *Television Horror Movie Hosts* are quite entertaining, but maybe the theme should have been kept to a series of articles in *Filmfax* magazine (which has gone over a lot of this territory already). Elena Watson details the careers of '68 Vampires, Mad Scientists and other denizens of the Late-Night Airwaves*. The hosts pretty much break up into three categories: the serious scholar; the spooky prankster; and the busy vamp.

Two problems: One, the format. It would seem that Watson follows a set guideline in writing each chapter. She gives a brief synopsis of the career of the host, then fills in the blanks, often repeating herself. Continually we are told that the hosts worked with classics such as *THE BEAST WITH FIVE FINGERS* and *THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME*, and dogs such as *THE INDESTRUCTIBLE MAN* and *THE GIANT BEHEMOTH*. Second problem: The hosts themselves are interchangeable. Halfway through the book you realize that most of these guys (and gals) did the same silly things and showed the same lousy flicks.

One personal note: I thought my local horror host got short changed. Bob Wilkins of Oakland's *Creature Features* is pretty much passed over for his replacement, John Stanley, a stiff, one-note egomaniac. No one in the Bay Area who grew up with *Creature Features* from the beginning considered Stanley anything but

a self-serving dweeb (everyone that is, except for my mentally incompetent co-editor, Scoler!). And where's Sonny Joe Fox, who hosted *Sinister Cinema* for the Classic Movie Channel. Fox successfully combined the scholar with the prankster and showed relatively decent movies to boot.

Enough complaining though. I'll give Watson's study a marginal recommendation on the strength of her homework. Just don't read that Stanley chapter on a full stomach.

Both books are available from McFarland & Company, Inc., Box 611, Jefferson, NC 28640.

Making Movies by John Russo
Dell; 300 pages; \$12.00
★★★

Scare Tactics by John Russo
Dell; 241 pages; \$12.00
★★★ 1/2

Reviewed by John Scoler!

Attention all you budding filmmakers and writers out there: Have I got just the thing for you! John Russo, co-author of *NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD* and numerous other novels and films, has put together what he calls "The Film School in (2) book(s)" it used to be one, but his new book, *Scare Tactics*, is a companion to the original volume.

The first volume, *Making Movies*, is really only going to appeal to the budding independent filmmakers who want to know more about everything from equipment to financing to legalities to the more technical aspects of film production. The book is supplemented with chapters by several filmmakers who have been successful outside the Hollywood system including Sam Raimi, Spike Lee, and George Romero. If you've ever seriously considered making an independent film, you need the information in this book.

The new volume, *Scare Tactics*, will have a broader appeal because it deals with the creative side of filmmaking. Russo, using personal

examples from his own body of work, gives detailed examples of creating a concept, outlining, translating a screenplay to a novel and vice-versa. The information in this book can be beneficial to all writers, whether they are working on novels or screenplays. Even if you're not interested in writing, it's fascinating to read about how Russo came up with a concept, developed it into a story idea, turned it into a screenplay and a novel, and eventually had it produced. He does this using both his novels *Voodoo Dawn* and *The Awakening* (HEARTSTOPPER) as examples.

If you're at all interested in the film industry, check out these two books.

STEP RIGHT UP!

I'm gonna scare the pants off America

by William Castle

Pharos Books; 262 pages; \$12.95

Reviewed by John Scoleri

William Castle, the king of the gimmicks (see *TSF* #2 for a comprehensive article by Lawrence McCallum). In this long out of print autobiography, explains how he was able to worm his way onto the Hollywood scene and create some of the most memorable horror films of the fifties and sixties.

I'm sure many of you will never forget the face of MR. SARDONICUS, or tales of electrified theater seats for *THE TINGLER*, let alone the often reproduced life insurance policy for filmgoers who "die of fright."

It's all here, in this fast paced, laugh-out-loud memoir of the last great showman. He tells how each and every gimmick came to be, but not before he tells how he came to be a filmmaker—often by stretching the truth. His tales are fascinating, and after reading, one can't help but want to run out and see all of his films.

Unfortunately, many of his classics, such as *HOMICIDAL*, *THE TINGLER*, and my personal favorite, *MR. SARDONICUS*, are unavailable

(legally) on video. Fortunately for cable subscribers, TNT has shown William Castle triple features, and as a bonus, they include original tinted sequences (*THE TINGLER*), fright-breaks (*HOMICIDAL*), and the ever popular "Punishment Poll" (*MR. SARDONICUS*). My only question has to do with the last example. In the book, Castle says there were two endings for *MR. SARDONICUS* filmed, and very rarely was the 'forgiving' ending used. However, the cable version included the expected 'revenge' ending, indicating perhaps that there only was one version filmed. Perhaps we'll never know. Always the showman, Castle would probably prefer it that way.

*The Armchair Critic
is on vacation*

*The Mayor of Wyrnwood
has been impeached*

Reviews

Symphony

by Adrian Savage

Pocket: 1992; 288 pgs.; \$4.99

★ 1/2

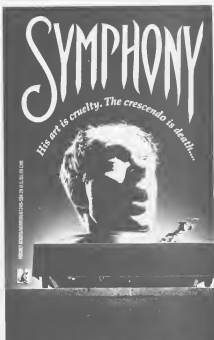
Reviewed by Brian Mullen

As usual, New York City is a hotbed for mayhem. It seems that ritual killings are baffling New York's homicide division. Inspector Ed Pulaski calls in Detective Sergeant Helen Singer to take the case. The victims are both men and women, either black or white. As a result, racial zealots are inciting riots throughout the city. So far, Pulaski and Singer have determined that a satanic cult may be responsible for the murders.

At Pulaski's request, cult leader Prometheus Faust is brought into the fold. Although Helen detests the psychic satanist, she reluctantly agrees to work with him. Besides, this creepy guy is an ex-cop who frequently supplies information to the police on a variety of cases, even though he presides over a huge criminal empire.

Along the way there are interludes in which victims are lured to their deaths by the disciples of Cal Hudson, a cult leader and record producer who wants to compose a symphony for the AntiChrist consisting of human screams (yes, you read that right!). The gruesome sacrificial rituals depicted in the novel are definitely not for the squeamish. Savage seems preoccupied with mutilated private parts. In particular, the torture scenes in chapter nine are quite shocking. Two of the disciples drill holes on either side of a Catholic priest's ribcage and ram their penises into the holes. The author goes way over the top here, and I was offended by this mindless scene of mutilation.

That said, the author does possess a riveting writing style (at least through the first eight



chapters) which indicates that his best work may be ahead of him.

For the most part, *Symphony* is merely a rehash of every devil worship thriller written in the last twenty years. Is there really still a market for this drivel? Only a few authors in recent years have managed to put a spin on this theme (Douglas Horton's *Deathsong* and Mark Manley's *Blood Sisters* are two good examples).

What really grated on me was the extraneous material. There's an incredibly long sequence where Faust uses his psychic ability to play card tricks with a mobster. This adds absolutely nothing to the story.

Though *Symphony* suffers from character overload, Helen and Faust make an engaging buddy-cop team. Trained in psychology, the woman is fascinated by the contradictions in her partner. Predictably, they fall in love. But it's hard to get emotionally involved in *Symphony*, despite the solid characterizations of the two protagonists, because of the gratuitous sex and violence, black magic mumbo jumbo, and the meandering plot.

Die Monster Die:
The World's Worst Horror Fiction
 Edited by Mickie Villa
 Malibu Graphics, 1991; 40 PGS; \$2.95
 ★ ★ ★

Reviewed by Michael Mallory

Remember those pages of solid text that used to appear in the middle of comic books, the ones we skipped over as fast as possible to get to the next comics story? There was a purpose for those prose fillers, as comics historian Jim Korkis explains in his introduction to the slender but delightful *Die Monster Die!* Chunks of text were required in order for comic books to meet the Post Office's definition of a "magazine" and thereby maintain second-class mailing privileges.

Editor Mickie Villa has resurrected two dozen of these literary soybean additives from the pre-code comics of the 50s, and put them in what might be the most honest volume of the current glut of horror anthologies. The subtitle says it all: "The World's Worst Horror Fiction." These very short tales (frequently composed, we are told, by relatives of the comic book staff) range from *Weird Tales*-style horror to weird fantasy to gruesome crime yarns, but each one has a common bond: they are truly dreadful.

Why then am I wasting this magazine's ink to rave about prose equivalents of tin foil on a filling? Because in a way, they are also wonderful. Aside from being fond relics of a much more innocent era, there are pleasures to be found in charting the anonymous authors' obvious glee in being able to drag their maimed plots to an incredible conclusion. And

some of the contrivances along the way are truly stunning!

For instance, we find this terrifying encounter in a page-long tale called "The Crying Coffin":

"I'm sorry, my dear, but I must kill you. I need your money. Ha...haaaaal... The woman fell, a huge, ugly dagger buried deep in her breast. Amos McTavinish wheeled around and pulled a cloth off a coffin he had bought just for the occasion."

It pays to be prepared. Most of these stories read as if they were being written by a clever twelve-year-old with access to a mimeograph, and even many of the titles are woefully clunky: "Bargain With Satan" (guess what happens), "Horror Island," and "He Dug His Own Grave," which tactfully gives you the "surprise" ending in the title. But there is an undeniable charm in their awfulness, the same sort of weird attraction that has made Ed Wood Jr. a household name. Some even display the rudiments of storytelling ability, and a couple have King-ian overtones. In the latter group is a half-page epic about a giant spider named "it" (hmmmmmm), and "The Lens Of Death," about a haunted camera that parallels King's recent novella, "The Sun Dog."

The true gem of the collection though is another half-pager, ten short column inches that constitute what has to be the most stunning, stupefyingly incredible piece of fiction ever put on paper. Titled (for some unfathomable reason) "Great Illusion," it concerns a mad doctor who has invented a serum that turns common animals into super-strong, "pre-historic monsters!" And out of the vast array of animals to choose from, what does the good doctor pick?

Cows.

"You mean to inject the formula into your cows and then send them to terrorize the countryside," the doc's assistant realizes. "You mean to conquer, loot and become powerful on the threat of annihilation of your monster-cows?"

Absolutely, ha ha ha ha! But the doc's plan ultimately goes awry when the starved monster-cows refuse to attack humans. Why?

"You fool! Even the townspeople realized it... Remember, Dr. Morton, a cow is herbivorous. It doesn't eat meat!"

they just don't write them like that anymore.

Absolute Power by Ray Russell
MacLay & Associates hc; 249 pgs; April, 1992.
Limited to 500 signed copies. \$49.00

Reviewed by Bob Morrish

Absolute Power, the first new horror novel from Ray Russell since *Incubus* in 1977, is this close to being absolute perfection. What keeps the novel from reaching such exalted status are a few annoying lapses in logic—lapses that are just significant enough to derail the reader's attention.

For the most part though, one gets so caught up in the intriguing storyline that the minor problems are hardly noticed. The story centers on a 21-year-old art student by the name of Cindy Carew, whose formerly wealthy father has just committed suicide, his sizable fortune mysteriously vanishing in the weeks preceding his death. When Cindy discovers her father's body, she also finds an unsigned letter which seems to have driven her father to commit his act, a taunt-filled letter which recounts an insidious plot to blink her father of his wealth, and which hints at sorcery, enchantment, and darker things. Cindy takes the letter and her suspicions to a former college professor of hers, Julian Trask, who also happens to be an expert on witchcraft and the like. Initially dubious, Trask is soon convinced that Cindy's feelings are correct, and a search for the murderer ensues.

Most of the aforementioned logic lapses involve Cindy. To cite a couple of examples: despite the fact that Cindy seems quite conservative, she decides on extremely short notice to move in with Trask—a man old enough to be her father; when Cindy makes this move, virtually all of her belongings fit into just two suitcases—a lack of material possessions that seems to contradict her wealthy upbringing.

In the overall scheme of things though,

these problems are minor. In *Absolute Power*, Ray Russell crafts a fascinating story that's equal parts mystery and horror, once again displaying his story-telling mastery.

The M.D.: A Horror Story
by Thomas M. Disch
Borzoi, 1992; \$22.00
*** 1/2

Reviewed by Robert Dunbar

Newsweek has called him "our most formidably gifted unfamous American writer." Thomas M. Disch has long been a phenomenon. His novels—especially *Camp Concentration*, 334, and *On Wings of Song*—loom among the established classics of science fiction, and connoisseurs of the genre speak of him in tones bordering on the reverential. The man's versatility alone astonishes. His six volumes of poetry have been praised by critics, and his nationally published theater reviews consistently display rare levels of erudition and insight. (The legal problems his own play, *The Cardinal Deroes*, encountered with the Catholic Church recently became the stuff of off-off Broadway legend.) Now, after more than 25 years as a respected figure on the literary scene, he's turned his hand to horror. In truth, though his oeuvre resists any categorization, dark elements could always be detected. Early collections like *Getting into Death* and *Fun With Your New Head* infused the weary literature of dread with some desperately needed vigor, even going a long way toward providing the conventional scare tactics with a veneer of counter-cultural chic. But it was the science fiction magazines of the sixties that nurtured Disch's iconoclastic talent, and it's this very background that now makes him so radical a force: whereas SF stems from a long tradition of enlightened speculation about the nature and fate of mankind, few horror novels since *Frankenstein* can boast a sound philosophical base. *The M.D.: A Horror Story* may be unique among contemporary works of supernatural terror—a serious and thoughtful novel which seeks to provoke a response altogether more complex than goosebumps. Yet, the feelings of

dread it engenders are merciless, unrelenting. Though it possesses many of the elements of traditional horror tales (a creaking staircase in an old dark house, something ghastly hidden in the cellar), the fears it catalogs are not culled from folklore or late night movies. As in the most valid forms of SF—those efforts rooted in Wellsian traditions of social commentary—Disch employs freewheeling invention to emphasize influences already disturbingly prevalent in everyday life. *The M.D.* postulates an America in which public apathy, governmental corruption, and industrial greed have collaborated in rendering the planet barely habitable. New diseases abound. And fundamentalist groups oversee concentration camps for plague victims. *The M.D.* ventures into that most alarming of speculative realms: the all-too-plausible future. Yet the premise remains as fantastic as any nightmare. At the root of all human evil, somewhere deep in the chromosomes, lie malignant supernatural influences... just as all the priests have always claimed.

It starts in the mid-1950s, during Christmas week in Minneapolis. Even the children scoff at an aged nun's denunciation of jolly old Saint Nick as a "pagan" manifestation.

...something in the conformation of this particular rock made her bend down and look at it closely...for a moment she...could make out, in the swirls and crackles of the ice, the smiling face of Santa Claus. She blinked but the face was still there in the ice, almost as clear as if it had been printed on a greeting card...seeming to wink at her with malicious pleasure.

But dark gods do exist. One such creature appears to young Billy, first in the guise of Santa (and no cracks about claustrophobia, please), later as the god Hermes. And his gift to the boy—a dead bird with some wire twisted about a stick—very nearly destroys the world, for this grisly Caduceus can truly heal...but only in direct proportion to the extent that it first afflicts. Thus begins a savage dialectic on the corrupting influences of power. If the plot possesses a major flaw, that flaw lies in its vigorously schematic nature—many of its rewards claim a similar source. *The M.D.* may appear somewhat eccentrically constructed, with its many asides and epiphanies of character analysis, but as it traces young Billy's growth to

adulthood and his climb toward becoming the most powerful physician in the world, it attains a rare purity of function: it induces absolute horror.

Purveyors of undistinguished paperbacks have lately complained about the "soft" market for horror. From the vantagepoint of the contemporary reader, buried beneath a barrage of pulp, it's difficult to interpret such a "softening" as an unalloyed catastrophe. Publishers have all but trashed this genre in their hurry to exploit it. Will they now become a bit more discriminating? Will forgotten criteria like literary merit begin to reassert themselves? The problem is not, of course, unique to horror. While hypocritically decrying the absence of originality, many publishers have routinely shunned all challenging submissions. Until quite recently, most detective fiction read like poor rewrites of Chandler or Hammet; and fantasy—a genre whose very name seems to promise limitless horizons—has almost exclusively confined itself to retelling the same tired sword and wizard fest (with only occasional diversions into aggressively quaint yarns about virgins who fly about on long-necked dragons). In any genre, true individuals—like Thomas Disch—remain an anachronism. If nothing else, his darkly satiric new novel proves once and for all that scary stories don't have to be about the bogeyman under the bed. With *The M.D.: A Horror Story*, the genre at long last comes of age.

ALIENS 3

★ ★

Reviewed by Brenda J. Grolle

Sigourney Weaver again brings to the screen her indisputable acting talent in the role of Lt. Ripley in the horror/SF flick *ALIENS 3*. Unfortunately, this time, her talent is not enough to carry the movie.

Unlike its predecessors, *ALIEN* and *ALIENS*, the third entry in the series lacks the fast-paced action necessary to keep the audience interested in the fate of the characters. It's not even a question of who will die, but how quickly it can be over with so that we may proceed

to the next scene.

The film opens with Ripley landing on a planet inhabited by male convicts housed in a leadworks prison plant. Being the only survivor of her crew, and the only woman that these men have seen in years, the danger to her is obvious. For some reason, the conflict between Ripley and the prisoners is given more attention than the alien creature. The alien is given little more than a bit part in this film.

Lieutenant Ripley is portrayed as a woman with some feeling this time, not just as some sort of an alien-fighting machine. She mourns the senseless deaths of her crew members, and becomes involved with the prison doctor; however their relationship is short-lived, as he quickly falls victim to the alien. To make matters worse, Ripley discovers that she has become breeding ground for the next generation of alien. Ironically, with her own death inevitable, she has an impossible time convincing the convicts that they have to destroy her so that the alien inside her will die. The cons want to keep her alive as bait to trap the alien, now killing off the inmates one by one. Ripley's own people, who inevitably arrive on their rescue ship, want to surgically remove the alien from her body for scientific research.

Throughout the film, there is some confusion as to what happened to the alien that arrived in the space pod with Ripley, Hicks, Newt (both dead as the film begins) and the android Bishop. It is that alien which impregnates her, but the audience also witnesses a scene in which a dog "gives birth" to the alien which creates havoc among the prisoners. The audience can assume that the original alien impregnated both Ripley and the dog, but then what happened to it? Did it die of old age?

By far the most entertaining scene in the film brings back Lance Hendrickson as Bishop. Ripley uses the crude material that is available to her to bring the android back to "life" temporarily. After confirming

Ripley's suspicions about the alien, he asks to be permanently disconnected, since he can never be restored to his original condition. Sadly enough, his brief appearance on the screen brings more personality to *ALIENS 3* than any of the human characters.

Fans of the first two films will want to see this out of curiosity, if nothing else. However, after viewing it, most will probably agree that it is the series, rather than the android, that should be put to rest.



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- The latest installment of the TSF BiblioFile—a combination of interview, bibliography, and fiction—featuring Brian Lumley.
- Since the Lumley piece was supposed to appear in #10, we're also throwing in a 2nd, "mini-BiblioFile" section on dark suspense author Andrew Vachas
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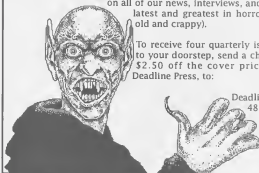
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